FRANK MERRIWELL'S LADS

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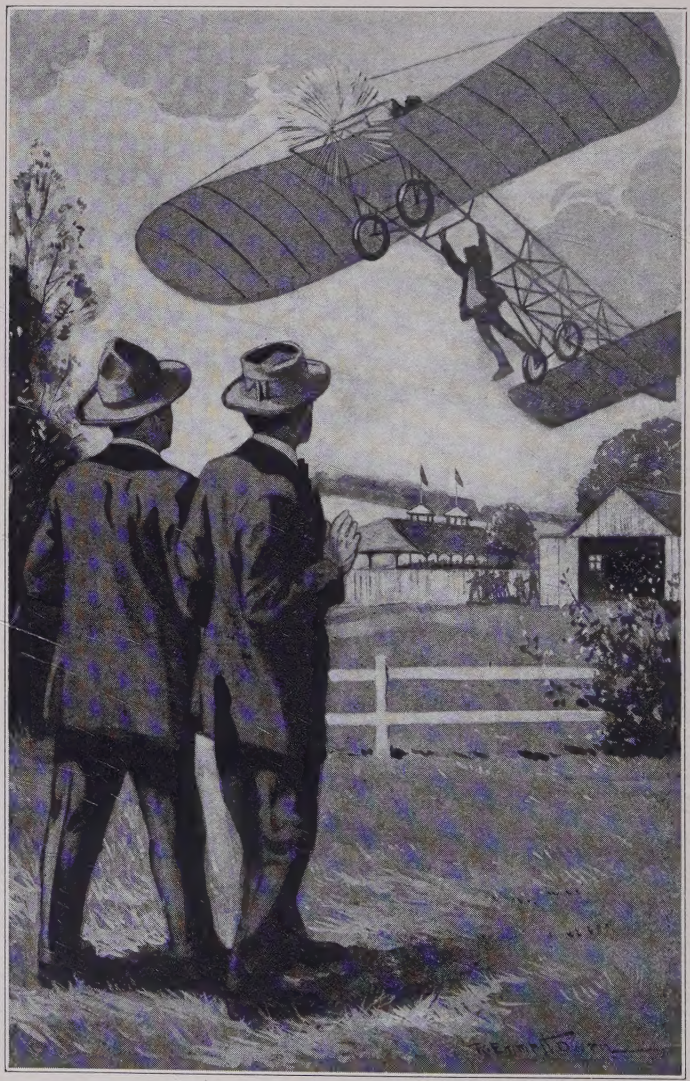

The monoplane shot onward and upward, and they gazed after it with white, despairing faces. Page 229.

FRANK MERRIWELL'S LADS

OR

THE BOYS WHO GOT ANOTHER CHANCE

BY

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"Frank Merriwell's School Days," "Frank Merriwell's Chums," "Frank Merriwell's Foes," "Frank Merriwell's Trip West," etc.

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Frank Merriwell's Lads

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FRANK MERRIWELL'S LADS.

CHAPTER I.

DROPPED TO THE SCRUB.

Dropped to the scrub!

Bob Wendell, still dressed in his football togs, sat hunched down in a chair, his chin resting on his hands, his eyes staring moodily at the door. He had managed to hold himself together as long as there was any one to see him. But, now that he was shut in his own room, the rage and humiliation which had filled him almost to overflowing for the past two hours found instant expression.

Dropped to the scrub!

After four weeks of strenuous effort, of rigid training and single-minded endeavor, he had, in a single moment, been summarily turned down; his place on the eleven had been given to Leavenworth, one of the substitutes, and a fellow whom he had always been accustomed rather to look down on from the height of his seemingly unassailable superiority.

Jim Phillips, the captain, had given no real reason. There had been some vague talk about Wendell's indecisiveness of character and lack of initiative, which made him more or less slow in getting under way. But Bob knew that was all tommyrot.

"Of course," Phillips also told him, "you understand that it is only a trial. Leavenworth may not

make good at right guard. But I want to try him out and see if he doesn't develop a little more speed than you have, Bob. It's quite possible he may not pan out at all, and in that case you'll be back in a few days. I hate to do it, old fellow, but I've got to think of the team first and do my best to strengthen it regardless of any personal feelings. But then, you understand that, of course."

Wendell had forced a careless smile and assured him that he did understand perfectly. Not for the world would he have shown any of the fellows how hard hit he was at the blow which had come so unexpectedly. He would take his medicine without whimpering, if only to disappoint the fellows who would have been far too glad to see him shamed and humiliated.

Yes, he understood—perfectly. He was a fool not to have expected it and been on the lookout for a move of this sort. He might have known that it would come sooner or later. Phillips had never liked him, even at the start, and the feud between himself and Don Shasta, the quarter back, one of the captain's closest friends, rapidly widened the breach.

"The little runt leads him around by the nose," Wendell muttered, "and gets him to do anything he wants. He's the one I've got to blame for this. I'll bet he's been working to get me out from the very beginning."

Like many other fellows, Bob Wendell was lacking in a sense of proportion.

It was impossible for him at any time to survey things from any but his own point of view. And, when in a rage, as he was at the present moment, his sense of justice reached almost the vanishing point.

He hated Don Shasta intensely, for the simple reason that the brainy, rather quick-tempered quarter back had never cared particularly for him, nor been at the least pains to hide that fact.

Shasta was, perhaps, the most popular, best liked boy at Farnham Hall, though no one could explain exactly why. He was impulsive, inconsequent, and hot-tempered. He could, and often did, ruffle a fellow to the point of incoherent fury, by a few pithy, well-chosen remarks. He was frank and open to an unusual —almost an uncomfortable—degree, for he never made false pretenses of any sort. If a fellow bored him, or did not appeal to him, he shunned that fellow without hesitation. Life was too short, he said, to waste time with persons one did not care for when there were always plenty of nice chaps around.

That there were plenty around him was due to an elusive something Shasta possessed which made almost everybody like him. If he could rouse a boy to anger in record time, he could also soothe him into perfect amiability in less. A smile, a joking word or two, a friendly clap on the back, and it was done.

Wendell had been one of those who bored Shasta, and the fact had been made plain without delay.

Unfortunately, instead of resigning himself quietly to the inevitable and seeking his friends elsewhere, Wendell made the mistake of persisting. He considered the circle which revolved about Shasta to be the most desirable coterie in school. He wanted to be one of them, and so he kept on trying until he was thrown down so hard by the expert quarter back

that intense hatred of the mercurial youth filled Wendell from that moment.

Wendell reasoned with the masterly simplicity of the heavy-minded.

If he hated Shasta, it followed without question that the quarter back detested him. He really believed it, not being able to understand the volatile chap's attitude of absolute indifference.

Wendell should have known better, however, than to credit Jim Phillips with ulterior motives in dropping him to the scrub. Shasta and Phillips were great chums, to be sure; but the captain of the team was not at all the sort to allow friendship to interfere with, or influence, his judgment.

Perhaps, had he not been in such a rage, Wendell would have comprehended this, and perhaps not. At all events, he was mad through and through at what he considered the injustice of it all.

"I hate the whole bunch of 'em," he muttered fiercely, as he got up and began stalking back and forth across the room. "They're a lot of low-down muckers. If I don't pay 'em up, I'm a dub. Phillips and Shasta are the worst, though, and I'll make them good and sorry they ever did this."

Not being possessed of a very fertile brain, however, an appropriate and satisfying means of revenge did not occur to him.

He could not very well pick a quarrel with Shasta, for the slight chap was a wonder with his fists, and the result would probably only further humiliate the deposed guard. Nothing else came into his mind,

and he gave up puzzling over it for the moment to consider another question which was troubling him.

He did not know whether to stay on the scrub or not.

His first impulse had been contemptuously to refuse to make a work horse of himself so that the favored few might receive the requisite amount of practice. It had been on the tip of his tongue to tell Phillips he could find somebody else for that rôle, but somehow he refrained.

If he did that, he would lose every chance of taking part in any of the games. A substitute can always hope, and Wendell cared too much for the game to put himself deliberately in that position.

It was going to be almost intolerable, however, to get through those first few days. He could picture the suppressed grins and overt sneers with which his falling backward would be received by certain fellows on both teams who were his enemies. No doubt at this very moment they were gathered downstairs, or congregated around the showers, talking it over.

Wendell was not abnormally thin-skinned; but, somehow, he felt an overwhelming fear of that first appearance on the field in his new capacity.

"I wish I could get away from it all for a bit," he thought, as he ceased his restless pacing up and down the room and stood by the table. "I wish there was somewhere I could go so I wouldn't have to see anybody."

A moment later, as if in answer to his unspoken wish, his eyes fell for the first time upon a letter lying

half under a magazine. It had come in the noon mail, and some one must have brought it up to his room.

"From Clarence!" he exclaimed aloud, as he picked it up. "Wonder what he's writing about."

Ripping the envelope impatiently, Wendell twitched out the inclosure and read it swiftly. As his eyes followed the sprawling lines, they brightened and he finished with an exclamation of pleasure.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed aloud. "He wants me to come over to Haddon for Sunday. Say, that would be all to the good, and I'd get away from seeing those dopes around here for a bit. I wonder if they'll let me go?"

CHAPTER II.

A RESPITE.

Clarence Fellows was a student at Haddon Preparatory School, which was situated some eighteen miles from Bloomfield. He was a cousin of Bob Wendell's, and the two had always gotten along well enough together, though they had never been very close friends.

The invitation to spend the coming Sunday with him, though it might not ordinarily have appealed greatly to Wendell, was exactly the thing he had been looking for.

To-day was Friday. If he could only obtain permission to make the brief visit, he would leave about noon the next day, returning Monday morning. In this manner he would see none of the fellows for two days, and by Monday afternoon the matter of his humiliation would be an old story.

He could scarcely wait until supper was finished to hurry over to Frank Merriwell's house and make the request for leave of absence.

Merry hesitated at first, for it was not his policy to let the boys make visits of this sort during the school year. He had been on the field that afternoon, however, and witnessed Wendell's reduction to the scrub. Having a pretty good knowledge of human nature, he understood what an intense disappointment it must be to the lad, and knew intuitively that things would be easier all around if the unlucky fellow were out of the way a day or so.

"I have no objection, Wendell," he said, at last, "provided you get Phillips' permission to cut practice tomorrow. I fancy he'll let you off for that single afternoon."

"Thank you, sir," Wendell returned gratefully. "I'm very anxious to see my cousin. I don't think there'll be any difficulty in filling my place on the scrub."

Frank smiled a little, quite ignoring the bitterness in the fellow's voice.

"Probably there won't, for a day, anyway," he said. "Be sure you take that first train back Monday morning, though."

Wendell promised readily and hastened off to find Phillips and get the necessary permission. Then he sent a wire to his cousin to meet him at the station.

That done, he felt considerably better, though the sight of Shasta and one or two other members of the team, laughing and joking together in the hall, fanned the flame of his anger to a white heat.

They were talking over his downfall, of course, and making merry about it. He was a very self-centered young man, and it did not occur to him that any one else could fail to view the matter in as important a light as he did.

"Never mind," he said, as he passed the group, head high and face averted. "I'll get even with you yet, you little runt. I'll make you sweat blood."

It was with intense relief that he stepped aboard the twelve-forty train next day.

For almost forty-eight hours he would not lay eyes upon a single inmate of Farnham Hall. There would

be absolutely nothing to remind him of the unpleasant event which made him rage whenever he thought of it. He would be in a different place, with an entirely new lot of fellows. As he took his seat and opened the magazine he had bought, he made up his mind to enjoy himself to the utmost, leaving the question of getting even until after his return.

Clarence Fellows, short, stocky, and sandy-haired, was on the platform when the train pulled in. As Wendell alighted, he rushed forward and grabbed his hand.

"Well, you old slob, how are you?" he said, grinning. "Didn't think they'd let you come, till I got your wire."

"Neither did I," Wendell confessed. "Mr. Merriwell doesn't usually. But I managed to work it."

Fellows winked slyly.

"Pull, eh?" he suggested.

"Sure," returned the Farnham Hall boy readily. "He thinks everything of me. I'm the original prize package in Bloomfield, let me tell you."

"I believe you," scoffed Fellows. "Well, let's get on. My ninety-horse power Reindeer is out of commission just now, so we'll have to hoof it. *Good* for you, though. It's only two miles."

Having only a small bag, Wendell was not averse to the walk. The cousins left the station and set out along the main street of the little village.

"Anything special doing this Sunday?" Wendell inquired presently.

Fellows laughed.

"Not a darned thing," he chuckled. "I just wanted

to see your ugly mug before we smash it all up on the gridiron next Saturday."

"The deuce you will!" said the Farnham Hall man, forgetting for an instant his grievance. "We're going to put it all over you dopes."

Then he remembered, and scowled. He was not going to play in the forthcoming game, and it did not matter much to him who won. It would serve the stuck-up bunch right if they were licked out of their boots.

Fellows apparently did not notice the frown.

"Don't be too sure of that," he admonished. "We've got a dandy little team this year, and a corking fine captain. By the way, how the mischief did you get off from practice to-day? I was wondering about that before and forgot to ask you."

Wendell smiled bitterly.

"That was easy," he returned shortly.

"I don't see how it was," Fellows persisted. "Why, Con Phelps, our captain, would never think of letting a chap off practice."

"One of the regular team, perhaps," Wendell said bitterly. "I don't guess he's so mighty particular about the scrub, though."

Fellows whirled around, his eyes wide.

"Scrub?" he repeated incredulously.

The Farnham Hall lad nodded slowly. His expression was not a pleasant one.

"Exactly," he returned, with a hard smile. "I was dropped to the scrub yesterday."

Fellows gave a long whistle of astónishment.

"Well, well!" he commented. "That's the biggest

surprise I've had in a long while. What in time was the reason for that?"

Wendell's lips curled.

"I didn't happen to be a friend of the quarter back, Don Shasta," he said significantly. "He and Phillips are great pals, you know."

The Haddon chap nodded understandingly.

"So that's how things are run, is it?" he said, with pursed-up lips. "Judas Priest! that's hard lines. I should think you'd want to get after this Shasta and give him what's coming to him."

Clarence's tone was not altogether one of regret. Though he seemed sorry for Wendell, there was a faint undercurrent of something like satisfaction in his voice. His eyes remained fixed upon his cousin in a thoughtful, half appraising, almost absent sort of way, as if he were turning over something in his mind which was intimately connected with the chap from Bloomfield.

"Get after him!" the latter repeated sharply. "What do you take me for, anyhow? Did you think I was going to sit still and not do a blamed thing? Trouble is, I can't think up a way to get even."

Fellows hesitated a minute.

"Can't you get him into a scrap and smash the face off him?" he suggested at length.

Wendell shook his head.

"Nix on that!" he said decidedly. "He's about the best boxer in the school, and I never took a lesson. The shoe would be on the other foot for fair."

"Hum—yes, I suppose so," Fellows agreed absently.

"That makes it bad. How about Phillips? He a scrapper, too?"

"More or less. No, it's got to be something else. I wish I could think of a way that would hit the whole crowd at once. I'm sore on that bunch of swelled heads."

Fellows' lips parted, and he seemed about to say something. Before the words came, however, he changed his mind, and for a moment there was silence.

"No chance at all of your getting back onto the team?" he asked presently.

"No, of course not," Wendell replied scornfully. "I got the old song-and-dance about it's being just a try-out, but you know well enough what that means."

Fellows nodded.

"Hot air," he commented succinctly, bending down to pluck a long piece of grass from the roadside.

He chewed meditatively on this for some little time before he remarked, without glancing at his companion:

"Only one way I see that you can get even with the whole push at once."

"What's that?" Wendell asked eagerly.

"Fix it so they won't win the game next Saturday," Fellows explained tersely.

CHAPTER III.

THE TEMPTER.

For an instant there was dead silence. Then both boys glanced swiftly at each other.

"You mean—signals?" Wendell asked, in a low tone.

"Sure," nodded Fellows.

His companion looked away, and a slow flush began to creep up into his face.

"I—thought of that," he acknowledged. "I—I don't like the idea, though."

"Why not?"

The Farnham Hall chap frowned.

"Oh, you know why," he replied impatiently. "It's a dirty trick. It's working against the school. Nobody but a mucker would do that."

Fellows shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't see it," he returned. "What kind of a trick do you call it to throw you off the team the way they've done? That's about as rotten a thing as I've heard of in a long time. They don't deserve to win the game."

"Still," Wendell objected, "that doesn't really give me any license to play the traitor."

Fellows sniffed.

"Tommyrot! You'd be only paying them back in their own coin. It would pay 'em good, too. They're cocksure of winning, and they'd be the sorest bunch you ever saw if things went against them. It's the only way you can get even with them all at once, and

it strikes me you ought to be obliged to little Willy for thinking of it."

But Wendell looked anything but obliged. For some time he strode along biting his lips and scowling. Out of the corner of his eye Fellows watched him keenly, trying to fathom what was going on in his mind.

"It's kiddish of you to feel that way," he said at length. "You've been thrown off the team unfairly, and you don't owe them a thing. Strikes me as a corking chance to pay the whole crowd up, and I don't see why you hesitate. I'm sure I'd jump at it."

"Think if it was found out, though," Wendell objected.

Fellows laughed.

"You're bughouse!" he exclaimed. "How the mischief would it be found out? Suppose you hand over the signals to me, how are they going to get wise that we have them? They'll think we're a mighty clever bunch, that's all. In the rush and hurry of a game, there isn't a man living that can tell for certain that the other team knows his signals."

"It might leak out through some of you fellows," the Farnham Hall chap protested.

"I'll look out for that," his cousin returned briskly. "I'll guarantee that not one of our boys'll blab. So don't you worry your nut about that."

He stopped abruptly as they came out of a bit of woods and saw before them the athletic field of Haddon School. There were already a number of boys about, a few in football togs passing a ball in a desultory manner. But the majority were simply strolling

about or watching the tennis players on the courts on the farther side of the gridiron.

On a little rise some distance beyond the field, stood the buildings. They were of wood, painted white and arranged in an irregular rectangle. The whole establishment was decidedly smaller than Farnham Hall, but for all that it looked very homelike and comfortable.

"Well?" Fellows questioned, his eyes fixed intently on his companion's face.

Wendell squirmed uncomfortably.

"I'll—think it over," he returned slowly. "You don't have to know right away?"

"Oh, no. But the sooner you decide the better."

"Well, I'll decide one way or the other before I leave," Wendell said, with an air of relief at being able to put off the vexing question.

"There's really only one way to decide," Fellows reminded him. Then he started forward briskly. "Well, come ahead and meet the boys. I want you to know Con Phelps particularly. He's a dandy!"

"Is he on the field?" Wendell inquired interestedly, his eyes roving swiftly over the more or less familiar scene.

"Don't see him, but he'll be along soon. Practice is due to start at three sharp. Sorry I can't ask you to watch it, but that would hardly do."

"No, of course not," the Farnham Hall chap agreed hastily. "Do you have to stay?"

Fellows grinned.

"They'll find it hard to get along without my managerial advice, of course," he chuckled. "Seeing as I have a guest, though, I'll try and wrench myself away

this once. Come ahead. There's Con just showing up."

He led the way toward a group of fellows in football togs, who had just appeared on the farther side of the field. In a few moments Wendell was shaking hands with a number of boys, getting their names and faces hopelessly twisted.

He had no difficulty, however, in remembering the captain of the team.

For Con Phelps was a chap whom one would have noticed almost anywhere. Tall and well built, with a thick crop of curly brown hair, the kink of which was an abomination to him, he looked at Wendell with a pair of level brown eyes and gripped his fingers with a heartiness which made the Farnham Hall boy take to him at once.

"Glad to know you," he said crisply. "Clarence said you were coming over. Sorry I can't stop now, but we're a bit late, and I want to commence practice. Wish I could ask you to watch it, though I don't suppose it would be very interesting to you. But, of course, you understand——"

"Naturally," Wendell interrupted, with a smile. "That would be hardly in order, would it?"

"Not quite," laughed Phelps, "seeing as we'll be up against each other in just a week. Well, by-by for a while. I'll see you a little later."

He hustled off, followed by the other members of the teams, and Wendell and his companion turned slowly toward the school.

"He is a good sort, isn't he?" Wendell commented,

his eyes roaming over the undulating turf and coming to rest on the group of white buildings.

"Best ever," Fellows agreed promptly. "You'd never think, to look at him, that his family is poor as poverty, would you?"

Wendell looked interested.

"Really?" he questioned. "Why, I thought Haddon School was a rather expensive one, as they go."

"So it is," Fellows returned. "But Con's managed to keep his head above water by working like a steer all summer and doing all kinds of odd jobs on the side during the year. Mr. Olmstead, our head master, is interested in him, too, and helps him along. You see, he's dead set on going to Yale. For that reason he wants a good prep-school training. He's got the right idea, of course. A fellow can enter any big college by boning away by himself and passing the exams, but he never really gets anywhere once he's in. Most of the fellows worth knowing come from prep school, and if you don't start in with one bunch or another, you're likely as not to be left out of things altogether."

Wendell nodded.

"Yes, that's what I've been told," he agreed. "There's such a whopping number in your class that, if you don't get a start by being chummy with some nice crowd in the beginning, you'll be shoved off by yourself, like as not. But, if he's so rotten poor, how's he expect to enter Yale?"

Fellows shrugged his shoulders.

"You've got me," he returned. "He's a determined rooster, and I don't think there's a doubt of his entering if he'd be content to go through the year looking

after furnaces, shoveling snow, and all that. He isn't that kind, though. He wants to go in for athletics and do everything that anybody else does. It isn't that he's afraid of work. He's shown his grit before now. He simply wants to get everything out of college life there is to be had, and just how he's going to manage it, I don't know."

"Can't he tutor?" Wendell suggested.

"Hardly. He's not much of a star in that line. I suppose it'll come out somehow, though. I sure hope it does, for he's one of the straightest, most decent chaps I ever knew. If he could only enter Yale without being hampered, I'll bet he'd be the most popular fellow in his class."

Wendell did not speak for a moment. His face was clouded, and there was a deep wrinkle between his eyes. Somehow, the thought of Con Phelps made him feel mean and small. He did not believe that a chap like that would ever consider for an instant the betraying of his own school team to a rival.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DECISION.

Fellows seemed to have a shrewd idea of what was passing in his companion's mind, for he made haste to interrupt Wendell's train of thought.

"Well, let's not stay mooning here," he said briskly. "You'd better take a look over the school, and leave your bag in my room. Then we might have a set or two of tennis. I can scare up a racket and some shoes."

Wendell roused himself with a slight start, and acquiesced readily.

Anything was better than bothering his head and depressing his spirits over a matter which would not have to be decided for another whole day, at least.

Under his cousin's guidance, he inspected the school and was much pleased with it, though inwardly he decided that Farnham Hall was preferable.

Haddon was comfortable enough and rather picturesque, but it had been built by degrees and lacked many of the conveniences of the larger school, besides being far from as well equipped.

By dint of raiding the room of one of his friends, who happened to be about Wendell's size and build, Fellows secured a pair of flannels and some tennis shoes. From another room the racket was forthcoming. Thus equipped, they sought the tennis courts, where they were able to play two sets before football practice was over and the crowd started back to the

gymnasium where the showers, locker room, and the like were situated.

As the two cousins left the courts to join the others, Wendell suddenly bethought him of something he had meant to say.

"By the way, Clarence," he remarked, in some embarrassment, "I don't suppose it's necessary to say anything about my having been dropped from the team."

"Not in the least," Fellows returned promptly. "I hadn't intended to. Considering everything, it'll be much better to let the fellows here think that you're still on it. If you decide about that—er—matter the way you ought to, they won't be nearly so quick to guess where my information has come from, as they would if they knew you'd been thrown down only yesterday."

Bob frowned.

"I don't see how they can fail to guess, anyhow," he protested, "considering that I'm your cousin and visiting here, and all the rest. A fool could put two and two together in a case like this."

Fellows winked significantly at him.

"Don't you worry, Bob," he said soothingly. "Can't you trust your Uncle Dudley to frame up a good story? I'm pretty clever at that sort of thing, if I do say it myself. I'll bet I can work it so that not a man on the team will really know."

That his cousin had always been more or less adept at deception was quite true, and Wendell took some comfort in the fact. His earliest recollection of Fel-

lows was of a boy with an almost uncanny ability of evading responsibility.

When the two had spent their summers on a grandfather's farm, it was Clarence who planned, and often helped to execute, various pranks and forbidden amusements, but never Clarence who was found out and punished. Usually that rôle had been reserved for Bob, and more than one fight had resulted.

In those days Wendell had hated his cousin and detested the underhand methods which now he remembered with more or less relief, as he felt that Clarence's agile brain could, indeed, be depended on to make up a plausible story.

As they joined the crowd in the gymnasium, Wendell made a strenuous effort to forget the matter which was worrying him, and was presently taking part in the talk and laughter and joshing, as well as any stranger could.

He found the fellows a very decent lot, but somehow Conant Phelps impressed him more favorably than any of the others. There was a certain honest directness about him which, together with the faculty of making a stranger feel as though he were one of the crowd, pleased Wendell immensely.

He saw at once just what Fellows meant when he said that the chap would be popular at Yale. There was a breezy freshness in everything he did. When he was discussing any subject, he had a way of making it seem as if he were vitally interested in that one matter above everything else. There was no pretense about it, either. He really was interested in a great

many things, and he had the gift of concentration to a remarkable degree.

Naturally the principal subject of discourse was football in general and the approaching game with Farnham Hall in particular.

"We're going to give you boys a run for your money, anyhow," Phelps laughed, when a few of them congregated in Fellows' room that evening. "Of course we haven't the material to pick from that you have, but the team's better this year than I've ever known it. You didn't make such a great showing against Wellsburg High, either, did you, Wendell?"

The Farnham Hall chap shook his head.

"Not very," he returned. "But we were handicapped by losing one of our best men the very day of the game, besides having two or three others, including the quarter back, knocked out in the second quarters. The game should never have been scheduled so early, either. We hadn't had three weeks' practice, and you know what that means when a whole team has to be picked out and coached."

Unconsciously his tone was defensive. He had not yet become used to the feeling of being on the scrub, and for the moment he had forgotten that he was determined to get even with the entire team.

Phelps nodded understandingly.

"Yes, of course," he agreed at once. "It's hard in any case. But when you haven't any old men to form the backbone of the team, it must be something fierce. Staying at the school only a year, I could never understand how you fellows did so well. I suppose it must be your coaching."

"That's just it," Wendell returned. "Mr. Merriwell is one of the finest football coaches in the country, and he takes no end of pains with us. We'd never do anything if it wasn't for that."

"Great work, Bob," Fellows remarked, a little later when they were left alone. "That spiel of yours was just right for putting them off the track and making them think you were all for your team winning the game. I never supposed you could be so slick."

Wendell looked annoyed.

"It happens that it wasn't done intentionally," he said stiffly. "I really meant it at the time."

He was angry with his cousin for intimating that he had been deliberately working to bring about an effect.

He disliked, also, the way Fellows seemed to be taking it for granted that he meant to play the traitor. He had not yet made up his mind, and the chances of his deciding against it were more than even.

The stocky chap, seeming to understand that he had made a false move, did not continue the subject, but branched off onto something else, inwardly berating Wendell for his indecisiveness.

Had the decision lain with Fellows, he would not have hesitated for a single instant to take advantage of such an excellent chance for revenging himself with almost no risk of being found out.

Sunday passed quietly. The visitor would have enjoyed himself more had it not been for occasional twinges of conscience which assailed him now and then, particularly when in the company of Conant Phelps.

The captain of the Haddon team seemed so frank

and honest and open, that Wendell, thinking of the treachery he himself had in mind, was ashamed. Several times he pictured the contempt and scorn with which Phelps would regard him, could he have had any conception of what was passing in his mind.

It was not a pleasant thought, and more than once he almost decided to give up the idea and get his revenge some other way. The fact that nothing else in the least feasible occurred to him, was what kept him from telling Fellows that he had decided definitely against the scheme.

The result of all this mental dillydallying was that Sunday night arrived with Wendell no nearer to having his mind made up than he had been twenty-four hours before.

"I don't like the idea," he said, when Fellows pressed him for a decision.

His cousin suppressed an angry retort with difficulty. Whatever other good qualities he lacked, the sandy-haired chap was not weak nor indecisive, and he had no patience with fellows who were.

"I don't see what's the matter with it," he rejoined, with some tartness. "There isn't a chance in a hundred of your being found out."

"I wasn't thinking of that," Wendell returned, rather vaguely. "It's so beastly low-down and muckerish."

"Rot!" sniffed Fellows. "It's only paying those slobs back in their own coin. I can't see how you're going to do it as effectually any other way."

Wendell sighed.

"That's just it," he complained. "Neither can I. You're good at that sort of thing, Clarence. I don't

see why you couldn't think up something else, if you put your mind to it."

Fellows frowned.

"Well, I can't," he almost snapped. "I've thought up one good idea. If you don't take it, I wash my hands of the whole business. If you're so squeamish as all that, and mean to let those dubs walk all over you, it's none of my affair."

A prolonged silence followed, during which the boy from Farnham Hall sat hunched in a chair looking anything but happy.

He wanted intensely to get even with the fellows who had humiliated him, but the innate sense of decency and loyalty to his school, of which he had a little in his make-up, made his cousin's plan extremely distasteful.

Besides, there was Conant Phelps. Somehow, he could not get him out of his mind.

"Look here, Clarence," he said suddenly, "you'll never persuade Phelps to use the signals if I give them to you."

Fellows suppressed a slight start with difficulty. This was the one point in which he had anticipated trouble, and he was surprised that his rather slow-witted cousin should have thought of it.

"Don't let that worry you," he said nonchalantly. "That's up to me, you know. All you have to do is to turn them over, and I'll see to the rest."

Another pause followed, during which the sandy-haired lad regarded his companion anxiously out of the corner of his eye.

Apparently Wendell was approaching a favorable

decision. But he knew that it might not necessarily come to anything. Bob was quite likely to change his mind at the last moment on the slightest pretext or none at all.

Fellows had the sense to see that perfect silence was his rôle. The time for argument had gone by.

For a long time Wendell sat scowling at the floor.

"You're perfectly certain nobody'll suspect?" he asked, at last, glancing up at his cousin.

"Of course they won't," the latter hastened to assure him. "I'll fix it so they won't have an idea. You can trust me to do that, can't you?"

"I suppose so," grumbled Wendell.

He stood up with a sigh and went to the window.

"Well, I'll do it on two conditions," he said presently, without looking around. "I'll give you the signals. But you've got to promise not to use them unless you can do it without giving me away."

"Sure thing," Fellows returned readily. "You needn't be a bit afraid of that. What's the other condition?"

"If Phelps objects to using them, I want you to drop the whole thing without making any effort to argue him into it, and send them back to me."

He had come to the conclusion that if a fellow like Conant Phelps could bring himself to making use of the signals, he himself would not be doing anything so awful in giving them.

It was more or less of a conscience salve, and also an easy way of letting some one else settle the question for him. Privately he had no doubt whatever

that Phelps would refuse to have anything to do with the matter, in which case he would be let out.

Fellows raised his eyebrows in amazement, his lips parted, and then closed quickly again. When he spoke an instant later it was in a tone of perfect agreement.

"That would naturally follow, Bob," he said slowly. "If Con won't have anything to do with them, I can't very well force him. In that case, they wouldn't be an earthly bit of use to me."

Wendell turned and caught his eye.

"And you won't try to wheedle him into it?" he questioned. "If he refuses after you've put the matter to him, it's understood that you let it drop for good and all?"

"Sure," lied Fellows instantly.

He had no intention whatever of abiding by his promise. But, being a chap more or less lacking in any moral sense, he had no hesitation in making it, though he meant to break it the next minute.

Wendell straightened up as if a load had been removed from his mind, and walked over to the table.

"Well, under those conditions I'll do it," he said decidedly. "Where's some paper?"

Furnished with a pad, he sat down and wrote steadily for some minutes, only pausing now and then to make sure he had forgotten nothing. When he had finished he handed the sheet to Fellows, who took it hurriedly as if fearful that the indecisive youth might change his mind.

"Now you're talking," he remarked lightly, thrusting the paper into his pocket. "If this goes through, you'll have squared things with that swelled-up bunch good

and proper. You ought to be darned glad that I happened to think of such a good scheme."

But Wendell did not look particularly glad, and his face did not belie his feelings. In fact, he had never felt more mean and despicable and ashamed in all his life than at this particular moment.

CHAPTER V.

REMORSE.

Bob Wendell's feelings as he came out for practice on Monday afternoon were rather mixed.

He expected, to begin with, that Shasta and the rest of that crowd would welcome his appearance with some signs of triumph at his downfall. When they did not, when they paid no more attention to him than they did to any other members of the scrub, he was actually disappointed.

The truth was he had counted on their antagonistic attitude to fan the flame of his resentment. He needed something of the sort to keep his temper stirred up and stifle the qualms of conscience which had been assailing him at irregular intervals ever since he handed that paper to Clarence Fellows the night before.

Had he been met on the field by shrugs and raisings of the eyebrows, had the men who, he told himself, were responsible for his downfall, shown the faintest symptoms of gloating over him, he would have been able to bolster up his inner self with the defense that what he had done was only something well deserved and well earned—the paying up of an underhand action by one equally mean.

Unfortunately he was not allowed that mental satisfaction.

Shasta's manner, to be sure, was cool and indifferent. But, from the very beginning of their acquaintance, the quarter back had never put himself out in the slightest

to be nice to Wendell. The other fellows greeted the deposed guard pleasantly enough, while Phillips even took the trouble to ask him how he had enjoyed the trip to Haddon, and inquired about several of the boys there whom he happened to know.

No one, apparently, had any intention of rubbing it in. Their treatment of Wendell was, if anything, a degree pleasanter than it had been while he remained on the regular team. And, instead of being glad, Bob resented it bitterly.

"They're so glad I'm out of the way that they take the trouble to be decent," he told himself angrily. "It'll serve 'em good and right to be taken down a peg or two. I'll certainly enjoy watching the process."

This subterfuge sufficed for some little time to keep remorse at bay.

It required something of a mental effort, to be sure. In spite of himself there came moments now and then when he had a sudden sinking feeling at the thought of what he had done and the more awful possibility of what would be his lot were it discovered.

However, in spite of everything, he managed to get through the afternoon in comparative comfort. He deliberately refrained from hurrying off the field, as had been his first impulse, the instant practice was over. Just in time he bethought him that he must do nothing which would show how sore and disgruntled he was. If he did so, and the fact that the signals had leaked out ever became known, he would be much more liable to suspicion than if he had the appearance now of being resigned to the inevitable.

Consequently he made a special effort to be agreeable, talked over what little he had seen of the Haddon team with Phillips, and strolled back to the school with Garrett Strawbridge, Don Shasta's roommate, who played right tackle on the eleven.

It thus happened that when he got upstairs he found all the showers occupied. So he took his seat in the hall outside on a bench placed directly beneath some stairs leading to the corridor above, and quite out of sight of any one coming down.

He was alone on the bench, and had not been there many minutes before Phillips and Strawbridge came along, glanced into the shower room, failed to see Wendell in his corner, and then strolled to a window near the bottom of the steps, where they stood looking out.

"Notice how decent Wendell was to-day?" Phillips remarked presently. "I never thought he'd take it so nicely."

"Nor I," Strawbridge agreed. "I tell you, Jim, it's a mighty tough thing to be dropped from the team the way he was. If it had happened to me, I'd been grouchy as a bear with a sore ear."

"It is tough," the captain acquiesced. "I hated like the mischief to do it, for Bob's a good fellow, if he is a bit touchy at times. And he's worked like a steer and not missed a single day since we began. He's too slow getting started, though. You know that yourself."

"Yes, I suppose so," Strawbridge returned. "I sympathize with him, though, for that used to be my fault before Don took me in hand. Is Leavenworth an improvement?"

"So far as speed goes, yes. I can't say I care so much about him in other respects. Do you know, Garry, I've misjudged Bob a lot. I always had a notion he was inclined to be something of a poor sport. But, after the way he's behaved to-day and Friday, I can see it's just the reverse. He's got his full share of grit to laugh and fool when he must have felt like the mischief."

As he listened, Bob Wendell felt his face grow redder and redder until it must have been flaming. For a moment he tried to tell himself that they had seen him and were talking for his benefit. But, even in his more or less bewildered condition, he could not make himself believe anything quite so absurd as that.

They were speaking without the slightest idea that he was within hearing distance; and what they said must be the truth.

And he had blamed Shasta for it all! He had insisted to himself and to Fellows, the only one with whom he had spoken of the matter, that he had been dropped because Shasta and one or two others on the eleven disliked him, when all the time it was for a very simple, ordinary reason. He had not been up to the standard of the team, that was all.

He had nothing to blame any one for.

He was just enough to understand that Shasta was under no obligation to like him. His wrath and indignation had been because he believed the mercurial chap had worked to bring about his downfall for personal reasons alone, whereas it would appear to be nothing like that.

Wendell felt as if the last prop had been knocked

from under him, letting him down into a bottomless abyss. A rush of shame overwhelmed him and made him long to get back to his room and shut himself in. He would have fled at once had there been any way. But the two fellows by the window made it impossible for him to do that, and in the other direction the corridor led into quite a different part of the building.

There was nothing for it but to stay where he was. Drawing his bath robe tightly about him, he edged farther into the corner. At any moment, Phillips and Strawbridge might take it into their heads to come around to the bench, and he felt that he simply could not face them now.

Probably he was never so relieved in his life as when a couple of fellows emerged from the showers and raced down the corridor. In an instant, before the two by the window could even turn around, he had dashed through the doorway into one of the vacated compartments.

Kicking off his slippers and throwing the gown aside, he stepped under the spray without a moment's delay. He scarcely felt the tingling of the cold water, and was away from it in another minute, rubbing himself hurriedly with a towel.

Through it all, his one intense desire was to get away where he could think things over quietly.

He did not want to see any one, nor talk with any one. For he felt as if it would take very little to break down his self-control.

All about him the fellows laughed and joked with one another from the various compartments or yelled

frantically from under the showers. He heard Phillips and Strawbridge come in and take possession of some more of the vacated booths. And the instant they were under cover, Wendell slipped into his things and hastened out.

He reached his room without being held up, closed the door, and turned the key. Then, standing in the middle of the floor, he asked himself for the first time a definite question.

What had he done?

Without the faintest shadow of a reason, he had played the traitor and betrayed his comrades. He was contemptible beyond everything. He realized, now that it was too late, that nothing under heaven should have induced him to take that step. Nothing could excuse it. Even had things been as he at first supposed, or worse, it could not make what he had done any less despicable. Because others did not play fair, was no reason why he should lose all sense of decency and honor.

And they had played fair. That was the worst of it. That was what made him cringe under the lash of his own thoughts and wish miserably, desperately, that he could turn back the hand of the clock twenty-four hours.

But was it still too late? Perhaps Fellows had not yet made use of the information he had given. On second thought, it was quite likely that he would take his time in broaching the subject to Conant Phelps.

Perhaps there was yet time to stop him.

With renewed hope, Wendell flung his towel aside

and dragged up a chair to the table. With trembling fingers, he snatched a sheet of paper and began a letter to his cousin. Halfway through the rather incoherent appeal he stopped abruptly.

"A wire will be better," he muttered. "That'll get to him to-night, or the very first thing in the morning, at the latest. I'll have to work it out so nobody'll guess what I mean, though."

Tearing the half-finished letter into tiny fragments, he tossed them into the wastebasket and bent to the other, briefer task. It proved, however, to take longer than he had expected. It was not easy to put his meaning into words which would be understood by Fellows alone.

He wrote and tore up a dozen messages. The supper bell rang, but he paid no heed.

He must get the message off to-night. He was beginning to be frightened now at the possibility of discovery. Just why his treachery was greater than it had been before, he did not reason out. He simply felt afraid, and horribly shamed, and desperately anxious to retrieve his wrongdoing before it was too late.

And so he wrote and tore up, and wrote and tore up again—and mopped his perspiring face.

The message which finally went over the wires from the Bloomfield office—brought in three minutes before closing time by a breathless student who had cut his supper—might have been evolved by a more agile brain in about three minutes.

"Have changed my mind," it read. "On no account do anything until you receive letter."

There was no signature, but the letter which went out on the first mail next morning bore explicit directions that Fellows was instantly to return the paper containing the Farnham Hall signals, and consider the entire deal off.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FELLOW WITHOUT PRINCIPLES.

Clarence Fellows lounged on the window seat in his room, his lips curling scornfully over a letter in his hand.

"Fool!" he commented aloud. "I wondered what that telegram meant. A perfect jackass!"

He glanced out of the window and frowned. Then his eyes returned to the letter, and he proceeded to read it aloud.

"'DEAR CLARENCE: I have changed my mind, and don't want you to do anything about those signals. I was wrong altogether. I have found out that there was nothing to complain of in the way I was dropped to the scrub. It was perfectly fair, and I don't want to get even with Phillips and the rest. They are not what I thought.

"'Please send me back that paper at once. I hope you have not spoken to Phelps—the name was scratched out and "anybody" substituted—about it. But if you have, you must stop the thing from going any farther.

"'Don't lose a minute in attending to this, for I am very much worried about it. Yours, BOB.'"

Fellows read the name of his cousin with scornful emphasis, and, folding the letter with a vicious twist, thrust it back into his pocket.

"Fool!" he repeated contemptuously. "I wonder what the deuce he takes me for? 'Don't lose a minute,

for I'm very much worried,' " he mimicked in a fairly good imitation of Wendell's tone. "Very likely you are. I'm sure I'd be if I'd done a crazy thing like this. But it's nothing to me how you feel so long as I've got what I wanted out of you."

Which sentence was about as accurate a keynote of Fellows' character as any one could devise.

So long as he got his way by fair means or foul, he was perfectly indifferent to the wishes, prejudices, or desires of other people.

Thoroughly selfish and quite unhampered by conscientious scruples of any sort, he was the sort of chap who seems to thrive and forge ahead to a phenomenal degree by means of his deceitful ways and underhand methods. Some day, of course, he would come a cropper, and his fall would be as rapid as his rise had been. But, in the meantime, his almost diabolical cleverness kept him afloat on the crest of the wave of success, while many a chap a thousand times more honest and decent than he sank beneath the surface.

All his life he had detested Bob Wendell.

As boys they had been thrown much together, spending almost all their vacations on the farm of the old man whose only grandchildren they were. Even in those early days, Clarence began to show signs of the duplicity which became later his dominating characteristic. The old man was wealthy. So Fellows set about systematically to ingratiate himself in his relative's favor, at the same time doing his best to show up Bob in a bad light.

He planned and helped to execute various pranks,

and then managed to throw the entire blame on his cousin. He even endeavored to make it appear that Bob was underhand and dishonest, and went to great pains to produce this effect, weaving his little plots dexterously and inwardly sneering at Wendell for falling into them.

It was all in vain.

Like many men who have lived long in the world, John Wendell was not to be deceived. He seemed to sense, almost by intuition, which was the honest boy; and, no matter how much he was lectured and punished, Bob always remained his grandfather's favorite, while Clarence was viewed with distinct dislike.

From that time dated Fellows' hatred of Wendell. But he had managed to conceal it so well that Bob looked upon him as a friend. It never occurred to the Farnham Hall chap that he had been asked to Haddon that Saturday for any other reason than because Clarence wanted to see him.

He would have been amazed had he known that his cousin was moved to send the invitation solely and entirely on the chance of obtaining information about the rival eleven.

During his stay at Haddon Fellows had discovered sundry so-called sporting characters about the village who were willing to put up real money on almost any event.

They were not governed by patriotic motives in their betting, being quite as ready to back another team provided it was stronger than the Haddon eleven; and, when approached quietly by Fellows on the subject, they announced their intention of putting their money

on Farnham Hall in the game to take place the following Saturday.

It was this decision unassailable by argument, which had caused Fellows to invite his cousin to come over and see him. Knowing Bob so well, he thought it possible that he might be able to extract something interesting from him concerning the strength of his eleven, and perhaps even get a line on some of the plays.

The possibility of securing the signals had never occurred to him. But when he discovered how matters stood, he had lost not an instant in working to that end. He had succeeded admirably. And, now, when success was in his very hand, Wendell wanted to back out.

"I'll see him in Halifax first," Fellows commented aloud, with considerable force. "It's likely I'll back water now, after putting up my money, and all that! Hang him! He always was a milk-and-water sissy for all his hulking size. But he'll find out he's up against the wrong proposition this time."

He stood thoughtfully considering the matter for some time. It was a delicate one, which he would have to handle with considerable finesse. As yet he had said nothing to Con Phelps. He was awaiting a more propitious time; for he knew that it was going to be extremely hard to persuade the captain to take advantage of the leaked signals.

For all his talk, he was not especially fond of the big, hearty chap.

Phelps was, however, so universally popular in the school that it suited Fellows' purpose to be on friendly

terms in that quarter. And he had sized the captain up pretty accurately.

The dominating characteristic of Conant Phelps was honesty. He was clean-minded, and straight as a string, but he was also extremely ambitious. Long ago he had set his mind on going to Yale, and from that moment he had bent every effort to that end. He did not wish to go through college as so many men are forced to do, denying himself every pleasure, and wearing himself out in order that he might obtain the coveted bit of parchment at the end of four dreary years of toil.

That did not appeal to him at all. He wanted the diploma, of course; but he did not want it half so much as did the elusive, indescribable something known as "college life."

He wanted to do just what the normal, average fellow did. He wanted to go out for football, and make the freshman team. He wanted to make a society, to be elected president of his class, perhaps. He wanted to be popular, and to be one of the men who stand head and shoulders above their companions. He desired, in short, to have at Yale very much the same position he held at Haddon School.

That was why he had come to Haddon, and why he worked like a slave through every summer vacation, and saved every cent he could without giving himself a reputation for meanness.

That was also why he wanted desperately to win the game from Farnham Hall. If he could be victorious against the stronger, much better-known team, his football future at college would be almost assured.

It would help in many other ways, also; for the chap who can lead his men to victory against a stronger, better organization is pretty sure to be regarded with favor by those who are on the lookout for just such material.

Clarence Fellows knew all this perfectly. With unerring eye, he saw the flaw in the other's armor, and made ready to pierce it with his weapons of insinuation and deceit. To begin his underhand maneuverings, he was only awaiting a favorable moment when Phelps should be downhearted and discouraged at some particularly bad showing of the team.

Meanwhile, Wendell had to be settled. Fellows laughed scornfully again as he thought of his cousin's frantic appeal, which had not touched him in the slightest.

"What's he take me for, anyhow?" he sneered, pulling a chair up to the table. "Jove! I'd give a lot if I could manage it so they'd find out what he's been up to. It would just about tickle me to death to get back at him that way. But I'm afraid it's impossible. Can't show him up without getting in bad myself. Still, I must keep that in mind. Maybe I can work it out later."

Without further delay, he took a sheet of paper and proceeded to pen an answer to Wendell's letter. When it was finished he arose and thrust it into his pocket.

"That'll about do for you," he commented. "Now I'll see if I can't do something with our esteemed and lordly captain."

CHAPTER VII.

CUNNING CLARENCE.

"Judas!" exclaimed Conant Phelps hotly. "It's enough to drive a fellow wild, Clarence."

Fellows nodded, his expression anxious and thoughtful.

"Pretty bad," he agreed. "The whole bunch seemed to be on the fritz this afternoon. What's got into 'em, I wonder?"

Phelps sighed.

"Heaven only knows," Phelps said, in a discouraged tone. "I suppose every team has its off days. But this is the second one in succession. With the game so close, I tell you it's got me worried. If it keeps up, we won't have the ghost of a show on Saturday, and I want to win against Farnham Hall the worst way."

"So do I," echoed Fellows, speaking the truth for once.

He hesitated, turning the matter over swiftly in his mind, and wondering whether his chance had come. They were walking slowly back from the field, after an afternoon of practice, in which almost every man on the team had been so absolutely and unimitigatedly "bum" that even Phelps, optimistic as he usually was, became downcast and discouraged.

For a moment or two they kept on in silence; then Fellows shot a keen, sidelong glance at his companion's clouded face.

"I'm afraid we really haven't much of a chance, anyway," he said slowly. "You've done wonders with the team, Con. But you know yourself the sort of crowd Farnham Hall always turns out. They've got the material to pick from, and we haven't. It's rather like butting up against a stone wall."

"I don't see why you say that," Phelps protested. "We've at least got a show of winning if the fellows only brace up and do their best."

"No team from Haddon has ever licked them yet," Fellows reminded him.

"Doesn't follow that we won't some day," the captain returned.

Fellows shrugged his shoulders.

"It's all very well to talk that way before the men, Con," he said meaningly. "But, just between ourselves, do you honestly believe that we'll come out ahead on Saturday? Knowing what you know of their team and their past records, can you really admit that we have more than one chance in a hundred of licking them?"

Phelps did not answer. His pleasant face was twisted into a rather hopeless scowl which told what he thought almost as plainly as any spoken word.

"No, of course, you don't—you can't," Fellows went on, the next moment. "It's enough to make a fellow sick, this playing year after year, and being beaten every time, simply because we're smaller and haven't the material. The boys are all good enough in their way. I'll freely admit that you've picked out the very cream of the lot, and gone to no end of trouble to work them into shape. But you know as well as I do, that

there isn't one of them who couldn't be improved on a whole pile. I tell you, Con, we're outclassed, that's what's the matter. I, for one, am good and tired going up against Bloomfield just to give that Farnham Hall crowd something a little more interesting to practice on than their own scrub."

Phelps made no answer; but his face was darker and more discouraged than ever.

A gleam of satisfaction leaped into Fellows' eyes as he noted this. The ground would never be better prepared for seed than at the present moment.

"And yet," he mused, almost as if talking to himself, "you have only to say the word, and the game's as good as ours."

Phelps stopped stock-still and gazed at his companion in utter amazement.

"What?" he exclaimed, thinking he had not heard aright.

Fellows smiled slightly.

"I repeat," he said calmly, "that if you say the word we can win the game."

The captain snorted impatiently.

"Have you any idea what you're talking about, Clarence?" he inquired sarcastically. "Is it likely that I'd stop at anything—anything fair, that is—to bring that about?"

Fellows shrugged his shoulders a little.

"That's just it," he said. "You would probably not consider this fair. Superficially, perhaps, it might not seem to be; but I've thought it over carefully, and it seems to me——"

"For Heaven's sake, cut out the small talk, and get to

your point," Phelps rasped. "What is it you mean? Spit it out quick. The ethics of the case can come later."

He dared not hope, and yet something about his companion's assured manner made him think that he might just possibly have an idea which would amount to something.

"Very well," Fellows returned coldly. "I happen to have a complete, accurate copy of the Farnham Hall signal code."

Phelps looked at him in bewilderment.

"The signal code?" he repeated dazedly.

"Yes."

"But how in creation——"

"It was given me by a fellow who's just been dropped to the scrub," the manager explained smoothly. "He didn't pull well with Jim Phillips, and was consequently dropped, though the man they put in his place didn't touch him as a player. Naturally, he was pretty sore, and passed the signals on to me, thinking that he'd get even that way with the whole bunch."

By this time Phelps had recovered his composure to a great extent, and stood watching his companion's face sternly.

"And you mean to make use of them?" he asked, in an ominously quiet voice.

Fellows smiled a bit.

"*I* can't use them," he returned. "But if I were in your place, I shouldn't hesitate a minute."

"Lord Harry, man!" the captain exclaimed indignantly. "Don't you see that if I did, I'd be putting

myself on a par with the contemptible scoundrel who turned them over to you?"

Fellows shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't see it at all," he said emphatically. "The positions are quite different. While I should never, under any circumstances, think of betraying my team as he has done, I can sympathize with him to a certain degree. How would you feel to be thrown off the team simply because the captain and quarter back had a grudge against you? It would make me mighty sore, and I can understand his taking the first means at hand to get even."

"Nothing under the sky can excuse a fellow for doing a thing like that," Phelps retorted. "There isn't any use talking about it, Clarence. I can't consider using them for a minute."

"That's what you think now," Fellows said quickly. "Just let me draw your attention to one or two points. You agree that otherwise we don't stand a show of winning, don't you?"

"Perhaps so."

"You admit that we're hopelessly outclassed, and always have been?"

"Well, ye-es."

"Just listen to me, then. If we made use of those signals we'd just about put ourselves on equal terms with Farnham Hall. It would be really nothing more than when a chap has a handicap at golf or a small boat has time allowance in racing with a larger one. Those things are perfectly fair and legitimate. Why shouldn't we have a handicap in football? Goodness knows we're smaller and weaker than they are."

"I see what you're driving at, Clarence," Phelps said, more quietly. "But it can't be done. Handicaps in golf or racing are open and aboveboard—things which everybody knows about, and which are in vogue everywhere. You never heard of a handicap in football, though, and if we made use of this knowledge to give ourselves one, it would be utterly low-down and contemptible."

His words were strong enough, and his voice emphatic; but Fellows' sharp ears caught a faint undercurrent of something like doubt, which heartened him wonderfully.

"There's another thing, Con," he hastened to say. "You've wanted to win this game for one reason in particular. I know, of course, that you want to win for the school; but, even more than that, you've been thinking of the future. You know that if you should come out ahead on Saturday, there won't be a question of your athletic future at Yale. A man who can drill a team like ours to lick Farnham Hall is sure to attract attention in the right quarters. It'll help you more than anything else you could do, and you know it."

They had reached the door of the gymnasium and stopped.

Phelps did not answer his companion at once, but it became apparent that Fellows' words had struck home. His face was fixed in a thoughtful frown, and his strong, muscular fingers worked unconsciously as he considered that phase of the matter. At last he gave a long sigh, which had something of regret in it.

"I understand all that," he said slowly. "But I'm afraid——"

"Don't decide now," Fellows put in hastily. "Think it over to-night, and don't forget to think what it would feel like to be captain of the freshman eleven at Yale, and maybe president of the class."

He hesitated a second, his hand on the doorknob. Suddenly his eyes brightened with a light of malicious satisfaction.

"It may interest you to know that the man who gave me the signals is Bob Wendell," he said significantly.

The next moment he disappeared into the gym, leaving Phelps alone with only his thoughts to keep him company.

CHAPTER VIII.

CONTAMINATION.

"Bob Wendell!" he repeated in astonishment. "Well, I'll be hanged!"

During Wendell's brief visit to the school, Phelps had come to like him very much. He had found him straightforward and pleasant, and they had discovered a number of similar tastes, a fact which always goes far toward ripening acquaintance into friendship.

To the captain of the Haddon team, Wendell did not seem at all the sort to do a thing like this, and at first he was inclined entirely to discredit Fellows' story.

Instantly, however, he realized that it must be true. Wendell's recent visit, his intimacy with Fellows, all united toward proving him the traitor to his school.

"Bob Wendell!" repeated Phelps, in a quieter, more thoughtful tone.

The provocation must be very great to induce a fellow like that to betray his team.

Phelps tried to picture himself in the other's place, and had to acknowledge that he would be furious did such a thing happen to him.

"Of course, nothing can excuse his giving away the signals," he thought. "But the temptation to get even for such a dirty trick must have been mighty strong."

Presently, realizing that he had better be changing his clothes, the Haddon captain joined the others in the dressing room of the gym. It might have been

noticed, however, that he was extremely quiet, and he departed as soon as he had his shower and was dressed.

He was thinking over the situation and, in particular, the cleverly put arguments of Clarence Fellows.

At first he told himself that it would be entirely out of the question to make use of the signals. Such a thing would be contemptible to a degree, and he would not consider it for an instant.

And yet, for all that, he continued to think of it all through the evening. Somehow the subject fascinated him. He wanted to win that one game more, perhaps, than he had ever wanted anything in all his life before.

Fellows had been right in saying that such a victory over such a team would result in making him solid with the athletic crowd at Yale.

Fellows had also been right in saying that without a handicap of some sort, victory for Haddon would be almost impossible.

Up to this moment, Phelps had not only encouraged his men into hoping, but had actually deluded himself into the belief that they stood a good chance.

It often happens that when a person wants a thing tremendously, he usually ends by believing it to be possible.

Phelps knew now that he had been wrong. They could not possibly win, unless——

"Of course, I'd never think of using them," he said aloud, in his room that night. "But we'd have a corking chance if we only could."

He allowed himself the luxury of a mental picture

of winning over Farnham Hall. It was a pleasing idea, and he derived considerable enjoyment from it.

The possession and use of the rival's signals would, as Fellows had said, put Haddon about on a par with her great rival. It would be a desperate, hard-fought battle, but Phelps had confidence enough in his men to believe that they would win.

After all, it did seem as if it would be more interesting, more exciting to the spectators, and really more fair, were the two teams thus reduced to a state of equality. When one came to think of it, the spectators should be considered to some extent. Nobody liked to sit through a game which was simply a walk-over.

"If I could only use those signals," Phelps thought during the course of the evening, "that game would be anything but tame."

An hour ago he had said, "Of course I couldn't think of using them." The two remarks were very much alike, but there was a vast gulf between them. Phelps himself did not realize quite how deep that gulf was, but had Fellows been present he would have understood and hugged himself for joy.

Unconsciously, the captain of the Haddon team had been working around all that evening to a little "if." Much as he wanted to win the game, he was not the sort who could make use of unfair means so long as he considered them unfair. He must first argue himself into an acquiescent state of mind, and it was characteristic of Conant Phelps that he honestly tried to eliminate the question of what effect a victory would have on his chances at Yale.

But, though he did not know it, that question was ut-

terly impossible to ignore. It was the crux of the whole situation; the motive power, not only of the game with Farnham Hall, but of the boy's entire existence. His life at Haddon was nothing more than a preparation for that greater, broader, fuller life which he hoped to live later in the New Haven university. It was, in every sense of the word, only preparatory.

And so, though he meant to cut it out altogether, and really thought he had, the consideration of his chances at Yale never ceased influencing Phelps for a single instant.

When he supposed he was arguing the matter out in a reasonable, logical, unprejudiced manner, somewhere in his subconscious mind he was picturing himself as captain of the Yale freshman team next fall. It was not his solicitude for the spectators and a desire to give them the worth of their money in a close, exciting game, which influenced him half so much as did the thought of what it would be like were he elected president of the freshman class.

The truth was that he *wanted* to use those signals. To his mind it was the only way whereby Haddon could come off victorious; and, when he reached the point of using that very small word with an infinitely great meaning, the ultimate conclusion was not in much doubt.

The transition from "if" to "how" was comparatively simple and natural. Pursuing the same trend of fallacious, but plausible, reasoning, almost the next question in Phelps' mind was:

"If the signals could be used, how are we going to

keep the fact that we know them from being perceived by the other team?"

After that it was as good as over. Without having admitted for a single moment that he had the slightest intention of taking Fellows' advice, Phelps worked out an elaborate plan of campaign, going so far as to decide how many and just which members of his own team would have to be let into the secret.

And then, having deluded himself deliberately with arguments which he knew to be false, but to whose flimsiness he remained purposely blind, he slipped out of his clothes, put out the light, and went to bed.

But not to sleep. In the still hours of the night, with the crisp breeze blowing across him from the open window, and his eyes fixed on the blue-black arch of sky sprinkled with myriads of clean, untarnished stars, he could not quite keep down the qualms of conscience.

He knew that what he had decided on was wrong. He knew that by accepting the stolen signals he was placing himself on a level with the traitor who had given them. But he did not change his mind; for ambition—gripping, powerful ambition—dominated him now, and stifled those other, better qualities which might have saved him had they been a little stronger.

It was a pity!

CHAPTER IX.

DESPAIR.

Bob Wendell caught his breath sharply and snatched the letter from little Willie Stearns. Without a word of thanks, without even hearing the boy's halting explanation of how he got it at the office with his own mail, the older fellow turned abruptly and strode away, his face a perfect mirror for the anxious suspense which filled his soul.

"I thought it would never come," he muttered, tearing the envelope with nervous fingers and taking out the inclosure.

For an instant he held it in his hand as if not daring to look at it. Then, with a muttered growl at his foolishness, he twitched the sheets open. The letter covered two closely written pages:

"DEAR BOB: I was very much surprised at your wire last night, and even more surprised when I received your letter, which I have just read. There's no sense in my commenting on your extraordinary change of mind after having had a whole day in which to consider the matter and decide exactly as you wished to without any one trying to influence you. Of course, the discovery you say you have made about the attitude of the fellows you thought were responsible for your being dropped makes some difference; but I can't help wondering if you aren't mistaken about this last.

"But that doesn't make much difference one way or another. The point is this: What you ask me to do is

utterly impossible. Before your wire reached me I had already taken up the matter with Phelps, who proved quite agreeable, and together we arranged a plan for using the signals. By this time more than half the members of the team have copies of the code and are committing it to memory. You can see from this that it is too late to do anything about it. Even if I could bring myself to back water, it wouldn't do a particle of good. Once the boys know the signals and are able to tell in advance what play is going to be made, it would be a physical impossibility to prevent them from using that knowledge. They couldn't do it if they tried. They would know instinctively what play was coming, and no power on earth could keep them from preparing for it.

"Why not stop worrying about it, and just drift with the tide? Let things go—for that's what you'll have to do. Personally, I think you're mistaken about Phillips and Shasta not being your enemies. It sounds a bit fishy when you say you were bounced because you didn't make good. I know you and your playing pretty well, and I know it would be hard to find your equal at right guard.

"Of course, I've been very careful about all this, and no one suspects where the signals came from. I'm sorry if you're disappointed, but you can easily see the situation for yourself.

"By-by, old fellow, and don't worry. Everything will come out all right. See you Saturday.

"Ever yours,

"CLARENCE."

For a full minute Wendell stood staring at the letter in actual horror. He had counted so much on being able to stop Fellows before he got under way that the disappointment was one of the bitterest he had ever known. It made him sick for a second or two—really

physically nauseated. After that came a wave of despair, intense and utter.

What was there left for him to do now? Absolutely nothing. He was helpless, bound hand and foot, obliged to stand aside and watch the result of his despicable treachery.

It never occurred to him that Fellows' letter was a mass of fabrication from beginning to end, that there was scarcely a word of truth in it. His cousin's arguments were plausible enough. He had to admit that they were unanswerable. Once the men had learned the signals, nothing could prevent their profiting by them. He was surprised that Clarence had carried the thing through with such expedition, but even that was quite possible. He had had all day Monday in which to put his plans into action.

The fact that Conant Phelps had agreed so readily to the underhand scheme brought with it not a grain of comfort. Wendell was conscious of a sort of dull surprise at having so misjudged the chap he had liked, but not for an instant did he delude himself with the idea that this was an excuse for his own treachery.

He was to blame and no one else. He had done this thing with his eyes open, and now he must bear the consequences alone.

Utterly, intolerably miserable, he went up to his room and shut himself in. Was there nothing he could do to repair the mischief?

At first he came to the conclusion that the only thing for him to do—as, of course, it was—was to go to Phillips and confess everything. He even got so

far as to open the door and step out into the corridor, and then his heart failed him.

He could not bring himself to do it. He knew that the result would be annihilation, utter and complete, so far as his school and college future was concerned. The fellow who had once betrayed his team to a rival could never again expect to take part in athletics. Not only that, but he would always be regarded with contempt and scorn wherever he went. His whole life would be practically ruined. He could not do it. He had not enough courage.

At length, after searching desperately for some other way out, a tiny ray of hope came to him. If he could only persuade Phillips to change the signals before the game with Haddon, all would be well. But could he do it without giving his reason? He was not an adept at deception, being a chap who always went at things directly, without any circumlocution; but he made up his mind to do his best; and with that end in view he lingered after the practice that day, hoping to get a chance to walk back with the captain alone.

His clumsy maneuverings happened to succeed.

Phillips was detained, talking over some matters with Frank Merriwell. When they parted, he naturally fell into step with Wendell, whose shoe laces had become untied several times and slowly retied with elaborate, time-consuming care.

For a moment or two they walked along in silence. Wendell was nerving himself to the point of speech, and Phillips seemed absorbed in thought.

At last the scrub man took the plunge.

"I suppose you'll be changing the signals pretty soon," he remarked, in a carefully casual tone.

The captain looked at him in surprise.

"Change the signals?" he repeated. "Why should I do that?"

Wendell was thankful that the gathering darkness hid the embarrassed expression he knew was on his face.

"Oh, I don't know," he returned slowly. "Matter of precaution, I suppose. I thought you always changed them before an important game."

Phillips laughed.

"You don't call the game with Haddon important, do you?" he inquired lightly. "They've never licked us yet."

"They've got a mighty nice little team this year," Wendell protested.

"So have we. Besides, I can't see a chance of the signals leaking out. I may change them before we play Fardale, for that's the big game of the season; but the boys are all well up in them now, and it seems like unnecessary work to give them a lot to do before Saturday."

Wendell was bitterly disappointed, but he dared not say anything more on the subject. As it was, he was stricken with a sudden fear that he had said too much. After the game on Saturday, Phillips might remember this conversation and become suspicious. Consequently he hastened to agree with his companion, and at once turned the conversation into other channels.

The days which followed were full of positive torture for Bob Wendell. He worried and fretted until

it was surprising he did not give himself away to his companions. Several of them remarked on his seriousness, and more than one surmised that he must be sick; but none of them seemed to realize that it was sickness of the mind which troubled him.

From time to time he cudgeled his brain, striving to think of some way in which he could prevent the thing he dreaded happening, but all in vain; and at last he awoke on Saturday morning with the realization that a few short hours would tell the story.

The Haddon team arrived shortly before dinner, and were met at the station by their rivals, who escorted them to the house. Wendell was among the number, though he would have given almost anything to be able to stay away.

Fellows approached him at once.

"You're still worrying," he said reprovingly, after an appraising glance at his cousin's frowning face. "Don't be a fool, Bob. It'll all come out right, and nobody'll suspect you."

Wendell promptly shut him up. He did not wish to talk about the matter. Besides, the sight of Conant Phelps had given him an idea. It was absurd, of course, and wholly futile had he realized it; but still, by the time they had reached the school, his mind was made up. He would go to the captain of the Haddon team and beg him not to use the signals.

He hated the thought, for it would mean giving himself away to the chap he liked, and who seemed so honest and open; but he meant to do it. He had no way of knowing that Fellows had betrayed his trust and broken his word by telling Phelps already who

was responsible for the leak. But, then, Bob had no conception of many, many underhand things which had emanated from that precious cousin of his.

It seemed as if he was never going to get a chance to speak to Phelps alone. Dinner over, the fellows lounged about the grounds for an hour or so before dressing, but always the pleasant-faced fellow from Haddon was surrounded by a group of others. Even after they had dressed and made their way to the field, the same trying conditions prevailed.

Wendell hung about, growing more and more anxious and impatient; but at last, not five minutes before three, the moment came for which he had been waiting, and he lost not a second in taking advantage of it. Stepping swiftly forward, he touched the rival captain on the arm.

"Look here, Phelps," he said, in a low, hurried tone, without preamble of any sort, "won't you please not use those signals of ours? I was a contemptible cur to give them to Fellows, and I've worried myself nearly sick over it. If you'd only——"

While he had been speaking, Phelps' face grew suddenly darker, and his lips straightened out in a thin, determined line.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Wendell," he broke in curtly. "I'm here to play the game for all it's worth. I know nothing of any signals except our own."

There was an utter finality in his tone which cut Wendell like the lash of a whip, and made him realize the futility of further argument. Phelps had evidently made up his mind, and nothing could change it.

Without another word, the disheartened chap turned on his heel and walked away to where the substitutes were already gathering. It was too late now even for confession. Nothing was left him but the hope that his team might prove strong enough to win even against the heavy handicap.

They were so totally unsuspicious, so unprepared for what was coming. If they only had an inkling of what was in store for them, there might be a little chance. But they had not, and Wendell could not give them even a hint. He could only crouch there on the side lines and watch with sinking heart and remorseful eyes the evidence of his handiwork.

His lot was not one to be envied.

CHAPTER X.

RETRIBUTION.

The game started with a rush and swing. Farnham Hall had the ball and began at once to work it down the field. The boys were confident that they would have little difficulty in making a goal during the first quarter.

Their opponents averaged a good ten pounds lighter than they, and, while this might not count for as much as it would have a couple of seasons before, weight and strength must always be desirable qualities in a football player.

Very soon, however, it was seen that the Farnham Hall boys had underestimated their opponents. Instead of carrying everything before them, as they had expected, by sweeping gains of six or eight yards at a time, they found themselves opposed with a fierce determination, backed by brainwork of a very high order. Evidently the Haddonites made up in speed and swiftness and grit what they lacked in other ways.

It was a complete surprise to every one on the team. Shasta's brain was never in finer working order. He varied the plays with amazing cleverness, and yet the defense met them each time, solid as a rock. Instead of six or eight yard gains, they crept forward like a line of snails, sometimes barely making their five yards in three downs. At length they were driven to punt, and the pigskin changed hands.

Though not so strong on the attack, Haddon showed up well. Phelps, playing at quarter, was fully the equal of Don Shasta, if not his superior; and the ball was forced to within twelve yards of the Farnham Hall goal before it was lost by a fumble. During the remainder of the quarter it did not once cross into the fifty-five yard line.

"Greatest frost I ever saw," Shasta commented, as the players gathered in a little group during the three-minute intermission. "We've certainly sized up those boys wrong. They're corkers."

"It's Phelps, I think," Phillips said thoughtfully. "I've heard some mighty good things of his work, but I never thought he'd get together a bunch like this. We've got to brace up, fellows, and come alive. It's not going to be any cinch. We've got to get after 'em and hammer their weak spots. Their defense is quite some better than their attack."

"It sure is," Shasta agreed emphatically. "I did my little darndest to get through them; but, no matter how I varied things, they were right on the spot every time. Seems like Phelps was almost a mind reader, and knew what was coming beforehand."

"He's a clever boy, all right," Phillips agreed absently. "Just step over here, Don. I want to tell you something."

From his place on the ground, Wendell watched them fearfully out of the corner of his eye. Shasta's words, uttered as they were, in a half-joking tone, struck terror to his heart. Was it possible that they had any idea of the truth? Did Phillips suspect, and what was it they were discussing?

It was an awful thought. What should he do if they found out that he was a traitor who had betrayed them to the enemy? He felt sick and faint until the whistle of the referee called the two teams back to the field and the continuation of the game gave him something else to think about.

With sinking heart, he watched the waging of this unequal struggle. Presently he began to long fiercely for a chance to go into the game. He felt that anything would be better than sitting here idle. If he could only have a place in the line, he might at least make an effort to repair the damage he had done.

Had Phillips only known it, his best move would have been to put into play the substitute guard; for Wendell would have fought desperately, fiercely, as long as there was a breath left in his body. He was wrought up to that pitch when men accomplish wonders and astonish everybody by fairly outdoing themselves.

Unfortunately, however, the captain was as ignorant of this fact as he was of that other, more vital one, which had made the contest such a surprise to every one; and, though two men were disabled during that period and had to leave the field, he remembered Wendell's poor showing of late, and did not call him out.

When the second quarter ended with neither side having scored, the excitement began to run high. Rarely before had there been such a game on the Farnham Hall field. Usually the strength and standing of a team can be pretty accurately estimated beforehand. But, in this case, the showing of the Haddon team was a complete surprise, even to their own supporters.

Clarence Fellows, standing among the substitutes, had difficulty in suppressing a complacent smile. Everything had worked out exactly as he had planned it, his only fear now being that the game might result in a tie. He had great hopes, however, of there being something doing toward the end.

It was impossible that the Farnham Hall men could keep up the pace without becoming exhausted. Charging as they did, time after time, against a defense which was as solid as a stone wall, they must waste strength and energy; and when their best efforts continued to be of no avail, it was certain they would become discouraged and lose heart. Their opponents, on the contrary, not only utilized effectually every ounce of strength by never making a false or futile move, but were buoyed up and encouraged by their surprising success.

With the beginning of the third quarter, Fellows' judgment was vindicated. There was a perceptible lack of snap and ginger in the home team's playing. Shasta had tried every trick at his command, and not one of them worked as it should. No matter what move he made, or what strategy was employed, their opponents were always ready for them.

It was small wonder that the majority became disheartened when apparently nothing they could do was going to bring success. Some there were, of course, who never gave up hope, but kept on fighting as they would have fought had the odds been ten times as great.

Unfortunately, while a few men of that sort may accomplish wonders by individual effort when condi-

tions are favorable, it is almost impossible for them to rally the drooping spirits of those who have made up their minds that defeat is to be their portion.

It was at this point that Farnham Hall began to lose ground. Phillips did his best to hearten up his men, but in spite of that they fell back slowly, steadily.

Sick at heart and overcome with remorse, Bob Wendell saw the end approaching.

"If I could only go in!" he said to himself, time and time again. "If I could only have a chance, I'd do something to make up!"

All sorts of plans passed swiftly through his brain as to what he might do if that chance came, but apparently he was not to have it. Perhaps it was retribution. It seemed only just that he should be condemned to watch, inactive, the result of his treachery; to sit there with nerves quivering and not be able to raise a finger to help the fellows he had betrayed.

He groaned aloud as the Farnham Hall line was forced back, back until they were battling fiercely almost on their very goal line. He yelled incoherently, almost hysterically, when Phillips, desperate, downed the runner by a splendid tackle, and so checked the gains that the ball was lost for the moment to Farnham Hall.

Two minutes later, time was called.

It was only a momentary respite. When the struggle was renewed, three minutes later, the Haddonites started out for blood. They were evidently determined to score, and they set about it with all the snap and go and cleverness at the command of their brainy captain.

The moment they had possession of the ball they started it down the field in a series of rushes, passes, and round the end runs which were brilliantly planned and executed, and against which Farnham Hall seemed helpless. Again and again Phillips, Shasta, and one or two others rallied their comrades to renewed effort, but all in vain. A good eight minutes before the end of the game, following a fine forward pass, Phelps made a touchdown and kicked the goal straight and true.

The game was thus won for Haddon. Nothing else was done during the remaining time of play; and when the whistle blew for the last time and a frantic yell of delight went up from the visitors' support, Wendell dropped his head for a moment into his hands.

It was the bitterest, most self-abasing moment he had ever known.

He saw himself as he was, cowardly, without principle, unfit to associate with the fellows he had wronged so greatly. He would have chosen to be beaten with lashes until the blood flowed, rather than to look into the faces of his comrades as they came off the field defeated, but trying bravely to bear themselves nonchalantly.

Perhaps he had been punished enough by the lashing of his own thoughts. It had been a lesson which he would never forget all his life long, and without which he might not have awakened to his most glaring fault until it was too late. Perhaps, taking everything into consideration, it was well that it happened thus; for a boy's character is of infinitely greater importance than many football games.

CHAPTER XI.

THE UNEXPECTED.

As he walked off the field, surrounded by yelling, rejoicing supporters, Conant Phelps was far from feeling that joy and triumph and infinite satisfaction which fellows in his position usually feel.

He was not exactly proud of himself. He had won the game, to be sure, but by what means? During the excitement of playing he had been able to forget; but now, as if to make up for the respite, the realization of what he had done came upon him with renewed force and made him wince.

But there was no backing out. He had set his hand to the plow and must follow the furrow to the very end. It would be suicidal to allow any one a chance for even the slightest suspicion.

So he pulled himself together and did his best to carry out the rôle of the joyfully victorious captain. He was doing it fairly well, when he suddenly came face to face with Frank Merriwell, handsome, smiling, and bearing not the slightest expression of regret.

"Well, Phelps," he said pleasantly, extending his hand promptly, "I congratulate you on giving us a wonderful exhibition of football. That defense of yours was one of the best I've ever seen, and your attack isn't far behind. Keep that up, and there won't be a question of your future."

Phelps took the hand held out to him and pressed

it; but for the life of him he could not look straight into those honest, level eyes. He had never been so heartily ashamed in all his life.

"You're—very kind, sir," he managed to answer. "We—did our best, that's all."

"And a very good best it proved," Frank returned heartily. "I wish you would take a little walk with me. I'd like to talk over a small matter for a few moments."

Amazed and not a little worried, Phelps acquiesced instantly, and together they strolled slowly away over the turf, followed by more than one wondering glance.

"I won't keep you long," Merry began, "for I know you're in a hurry to get back to the boys. What I want to say is this: I've heard indirectly of your great anxiety to enter Yale, and something of the sacrifices and efforts you have made to get a proper preparatory school education. You know, I presume, that I'm a Yale man myself. I've been out a good many years, but I've never lost my interest. I have always made it a point to do the best I can for boys like yourself who will be a credit to my Alma Mater. I don't mean that these boys must necessarily be good at athletics. That is always a desirable thing, but they should first be decent, straight, and high-minded, as I think you are. To come to the point, I shall be very glad to give you any help you may require to enter next fall."

Phelps could scarcely believe his ears. The thing he had longed for with such apparent hopelessness was within his grasp. He had only to say the word and his future would be assured. His cheeks were flaming with shame, the words Merriwell had just spoken

stabbed him like so many knife blades, but he did not stop to think of that in the wonder of this chance. He said the word.

"Don't bother to thank me," Frank said, as the boy stammered and stumbled over the words of gratitude which came so hard. "Just come and have a talk before you go. Hustle back to the boys, now. They want you."

Without waiting longer, he turned and walked briskly up the slope to his house, leaving Phelps staring after him, his face full of varied emotions.

What had he done? He was no more worthy of Merriwell's aid than a convicted criminal. He had spoken before he realized that what this man had offered he could not possibly accept. Decent and straight and high-minded! He laughed bitterly. He had no single one of those qualities, and yet he had allowed the assertion to go unchallenged. It was a deliberate lie—as great a falsehood as if he had committed it by spoken words instead of by remaining silent.

He hesitated for several minutes, apparently rooted to the ground.

Behind him the fellows were calling his name impatiently. Before him the tall, graceful form of Merriwell was rapidly retreating. What should he do? If he went back, no one need ever know. He might carry out the deception to the very end. His dreams would come true in a much more wonderful, complete manner than he had ever dared to hope. But could he ever be content with that? Could he ever forget that he had won it all by false pretenses? In after years would

the fact that he was nothing but a living lie ever cease to haunt him?

"No!"

The word burst from his tightly compressed lips almost ferociously, and in another moment he was running as hard as he could after the broad-shouldered figure of Merry, now passing through the trees which fringed the field.

"Mr. Merriwell!" he called loudly. "Mr. Merriwell!"

Frank heard him and turned around. His eyes were puzzled as he watched the rapidly nearing boy, seeing the expression on his rather white face. Accustomed as he was to reading men's characters, he realized at once that Phelps was suffering from some strong, vital emotion. He felt, somehow, that an important mental crisis had arisen in the few moments since they had parted. But he gave no sign, and, when the boy stopped panting before him and wiped the perspiration from his forehead, he waited quietly for him to speak.

"I—can't accept—your offer, Mr. Merriwell," Phelps stammered at last.

Merry was at no pains to conceal his surprise.

"What's the trouble?" he asked kindly. "You can regard the money as a loan, of course, if you don't feel like taking it outright."

The boy's face was flaming now.

"It isn't—that," he said haltingly. "I'd look at it as a loan, anyhow, but I can't accept—even that."

Frank looked puzzled.

"Don't you want to go?" he asked.

"Yes—oh, yes! But—I'm not—worthy. I'm—not what you—think me."

There was a moment's pause, during which the man's eyes searched the other's face rather seriously.

"Just what do you mean by that?" he asked.

Phelps had been staring at the ground, but now he threw back his head and gazed straight at Merriwell. The latter was startled at the utter, intense misery in the boy's fine eyes.

"You said I was decent, and straight, and high-minded," Phelps burst out. "I'm not. I'm not a single one of those things. I've been a cur, and I can't take your help. I'd give anything in the world if I could only live the last week over again."

Frank's brows were knitted slightly.

"The last week?" he repeated questioningly.

"Yes. It's all happened since then. You think we won that game to-day fairly, don't you? It was nothing of the sort. It was all a cheat. I knew your—signals, sir."

Merriwell's face was stern.

"You knew our signals?" he repeated slowly. "And may I ask how you got possession of them?"

Phelps dropped his eyes again and swallowed hard.

"One of your men on the scrub," he explained, in a low tone, "was sore because—he wasn't treated right. He—he wanted to get even, and so—he sent the signal code to a—fellow he knew at Haddon. They were brought to me, and at first I wasn't going to use them. Then I thought—I thought how much it would mean—if I won the game, and—and—— Well, that's all,

sir. I used them. The game really should have been yours."

There was silence for a moment. Merriwell leaned lightly against a tree, his arms folded, and his eyes fixed on the boy's face. They were cold and stern, but somewhere in their depths was a tempering glimmer of regret.

"What is the name of this boy who played the traitor?" he asked, at last, in an odd tone.

"Why, it was——"

Phelps broke off abruptly, and glanced appealingly at Merriwell.

"I wish you wouldn't ask me that, sir," he went on. "He's—he's sorry—beastly sorry—that he did it. He came to me to-day and begged me not to use them. Of course, it was too late then. The boys all knew them, and couldn't have helped themselves. I should have told Phillips all about it, but I hadn't the courage. But I'm sure the fellow realizes what he's done, and would never do anything like it again. I think—it's been a—a lesson to him, just as it's been to me."

Frank's face was rather grim.

"Very well," he commented. "If you feel that way, I won't urge you."

He paused a moment, his eyes fixed curiously on the boy's flushed face.

"Why did you tell me this, Phelps?" he asked quietly. "Didn't you realize that if you kept still no one would have ever known? You could have gone to Yale and made a success there. I should never have been the wiser."

Again the boy raised his eyes to Merry's.

"I thought of that," he said simply. "I wanted to do it awfully, but I couldn't."

"Why?"

"It would have been worse than using the signals. I'd have been lying every minute of the time by taking your money and letting you think I was something which I wasn't. I'd never have had a moment's peace, while now——"

He hesitated, and Frank finished the sentence for him:

"While now you feel as if you'd made reparation by giving up something you want very much. Sort of a salve to conscience, in other words."

"Perhaps so," Phelps answered slowly. He had not analyzed his motives to this extent. "I don't know just why I did it, except that I simply couldn't go on letting you think I was worthy of taking your help and becoming a Yale man when—I—wasn't."

His voice faltered a little toward the end, and his lids dropped swiftly over eyes which seemed abnormally bright.

"I'm afraid you're right, Phelps," Merriwell said regretfully. "No man who uses the signals of another team in order that he may win a victory is worthy to be a Yale man. He may win on the football field, but he has lost something infinitely better, infinitely greater—his integrity and self-respect. I'm sorrier than I can say that you have done this, but I'm glad you were man enough to come and tell me about it. That does not repair the wrong, but it shows you to have the right feeling."

Rather abruptly, without even so much as a good-

by, Merry turned and walked slowly away through the trees, leaving Phelps heartsick and full of unavailing regrets. Too late, the boy wished desperately that he had not done this thing, that he had kept to his first impulse and not listened to insidious temptation for a single moment. But, underneath everything, he was glad he had done his best to make good by telling Merriwell the truth.

* * * * * * *

A week later Conant Phelps came into his room and dropped disconsolately into a chair. He was still glad of the step he had taken, but at every hour of the day he was assailed by bitter regret at the opportunity he had lost. If only he had kept straight he would now be looking forward confidently to the goal he had longed for, for so many years. He knew it was futile, but he could not help sighing over what was impossible.

Presently his eyes fell upon a letter lying on the table, and he took it up. It was postmarked Bloomfield, and in wondering haste he slit it open and took out the contents.

It was a letter from Frank Merriwell, and, as he glanced swiftly through it, he flushed and paled.

"My dear Phelps: During the past week you have been in my mind to a considerable extent. Somehow I have a notion that your first experience in the crooked way is likely to be your last, and I have, therefore, secured a scholarship at Yale for you, and will see that you are looked after in other ways when you enter next fall.

"I think I can trust you now to be straight and de-

cent always, a man who will be a credit to Yale, and to himself. Sincerely yours,

"Frank Merriwell."

The letter dropped unheeded from the boy's hand and fluttered to the floor. For a moment or two he sat staring straight before him, his lips trembling slightly. Suddenly he sat erect and brought one fist down on the chair arm with a thump.

"By Heaven, he can!" he exclaimed fiercely. "I'll never make him sorry he's done this thing. I'll never do anything as long as I live which will make him ashamed of having helped me."

Springing to his feet, he walked over to the window and stood there with his face pressed against the pane. There was a long, long pause; but when he returned to the table the darkness made his face indistinct.

"He's the best man that ever lived!" he murmured softly.

Soon after this, however, a new boy arrived at the school—one who prided himself on his ancestry—and Frank Merriwell found himself with a second boy on his hands who had to be given another chance.

CHAPTER XII.

THE UNKNOWN BENEFACTOR.

Before the new boy came to the school, a certain incident occurred which had a most important bearing on the conduct of the boy in question during the first weeks of his enrollment at Merriwell's.

The front door slammed and through the hall came the sound of rapid footsteps. John Huntingdon Blake laid his pen aside and half turned in the desk chair, an expression of thankfulness on his pleasant face.

"Well!" he exclaimed, as a tall, well-built man, some years his senior, entered the room and dropped a doctor's bag on the nearest chair. "It's about time you showed up. I had an idea that you said you'd be back at eleven and here it is"—he took out a beautiful and very costly gold watch—"just twenty-three minutes past one. It's up to you to give an account of those two hours, Mac."

Angus Macdonald smiled a bit as he sank into an easy-chair. He looked rather tired and not a little discouraged.

"Doctors never have to give an account of themselves," he bantered.

"Don't wriggle out," Blake admonished. "Old, established doctors haven't a minute to breathe, I'll admit; but young, callow ones—— Why, ever since I came you've had time to burn, Mac."

"You needn't rub it in, kid," Macdonald returned,

with some asperity. "My patients may be few and far between, but they're coming, boy—they're coming."

A slight shadow passed over the young fellow's face. For a youth of not more than seventeen, he was singularly self-possessed and had a noticeable swagger. Had it been accompanied by a lesser degree of good taste, it might have approached dangerously near that unpleasant quality denoted by the vulgarly inclined as "lugs." As it was, however, it did not seem out of keeping with Blake's general atmosphere of refinement.

Blake's friends had been known to express the wish that he was a little less refined. It seemed to be almost a mania with the chap, and was decidedly unusual in one so young. His manners were polished to the last degree, and, though his home was in California, he had acquired the broad "a" and other peculiarities of accent which mark the speech of English people and many residents of New England.

His clothes and general appointments were miracles of taste. He would almost as soon have thought of appearing on the street in pajamas, as he would of wearing socks and scarf which did not harmonize.

In spite of all this, however, he was, at the bottom, as decent a chap as one could desire. He was clean-minded, generous to a fault, and a thoroughly good sort. He did not, however, relish any reminders of his youth such as "kid" and "boy," even from men as old as Doctor Macdonald. Hence that slight frown, which passed swiftly, for he was too well bred to show that such things were distasteful.

"I'm glad they are coming," he smiled, "even if their arrival is a little slow. Was it a new one who delayed you to-day? Some millionaire, I hope, who wanted a five-thousand-dollar operation performed."

"Nothing like it," sighed Macdonald. "This is at quite the other end of the ladder."

He frowned a little at the recollection and proceeded to fill and light his pipe.

"It's a mighty hard case, John," he resumed, leaning back in his chair again. "I suppose I'm soft and easy and will get a lot more callous before long, but I can't help being impressed now and then by things I see."

He stopped again, and Blake, who had been playing absently with the slender gold watch chain draped across his vest, glanced up at him.

"Well?" he questioned. "What's the matter? Aren't you going to tell me about it?"

Macdonald looked slightly embarrassed.

"It seems so thundering like a touch," he explained boyishly. "You've shelled out twice, John, since you came here for cases of this sort I've run across, and I'm afraid you'll go away with the impression that I've been bleeding you just because you have more money than you know what to do with."

Blake laughed.

"Don't let that worry you," he chuckled. "I'd never think that, and you ought to know it. Go ahead with your story."

"Well, since you insist, here goes: The man's name is Brown——"

"Uncommon, isn't it?" Blake murmured mischievously.

"No more so than his story," the doctor went on, rather fiercely. "It's the old tale of injury when in the employ of a wealthy corporation, and then being dumped by his employers taking advantage of a quibble of the law to evade responsibility. He was a brakeman on the O. & I. road, and lost a leg here in the Cleveland yards. Unfortunately they proved that it was due to his own negligence, so he couldn't sue. They were responsible for his doctor's bills, however, which would have been all right had he kept on with the physician who looked after him first. He didn't like the man, however, and made a change. They paid the first doctor, but refused to settle with the second."

Blake looked indignant.

"How could they do that?" he demanded. "I don't see what difference it makes whether he went to half a dozen doctors so long as he was hurt while working for them."

"The law says that they must pay the first doctor's bill, but if a change is made that lets them out."

"I never heard of anything so unfair," Blake exclaimed hotly.

"It's the law, just the same," Macdonald returned. "Unfortunately, Brown knew nothing about it. He went merrily on rolling up visits from the second doctor to the tune of some two hundred dollars before he got wise. Now he's up against it. He can't go back to his old job, of course, and the railroad has nothing for him but some light work around the yards at a dollar and a half a day.

"During his illness, all kinds of other bills have been piling up. He's got a wife and four children to support, and he's just about discouraged. Two of the boys can work, but the oldest, a chap of eighteen, has always been eager for a good education. He's as nice a fellow as I ever saw, pleasant-mannered and bright as they make 'em. He was going to enter college next fall and stood a good chance of working his way through, for he's corking at math, and could easily tutor. Of course that's all over with now. He got a job in a canning factory, and is doing his best to keep things going; but it's a darned shame, John, that a fellow with his ability and inclinations should practically ruin his whole life."

Blake regarded the seal ring on the little finger of his left hand thoughtfully. It was severely plain and bore upon its surface a coat of arms—the arms of Admiral Blake, who lived and made quite a stir in the world at the time of Charles I., of England.

"Ye-es," he assented, at length. "It does seem a pity."

He examined his carefully manicured fingers and then glanced up suddenly.

"How much did this Jones get before he was hurt, Mac?" he asked quietly.

"I believe he averaged eighteen dollars a week," the doctor returned. "Sometimes it was more when he worked overtime. I imagine it was never less."

"Eighteen dollars a week!" Blake exclaimed incredulously. "And do you mean to say a man can raise a family of five on that?"

Macdonald smiled grimly.

"It's done on less than that, thousands and thousands of times, my dear fellow," he said.

"But how is it possible?"

"It has to be possible," the older man retorted. "It's that or the poorhouse. You have a great deal to learn, John. Eighteen dollars a week is really big money. Of course, the two boys helped a little out of school hours, but it wasn't much."

"I should think not," Blake said emphatically. "If one of them put in much time getting an education."

He crossed his legs and linked his fingers loosely over one knee.

"Great Scott, Mac!" he went on. "It ought not to be a hard thing for a man to get a job paying three dollars a day."

"You're forgetting he has only one leg."

"Still," persisted the youngster, "there must be lots of things a one-legged man can do."

Macdonald's eyes twinkled.

"For instance?" he queried.

"Oh, well—er—er—a watchman, for one thing. They just sit in a chair, or hobble around a building at night. All I've ever seen have been old as the hills, or else crippled."

"He might do that, but who's going to get him such a position?" the doctor inquired pertinently. "He has no influence, and neither have I."

"I know Colonel Snowden, president of the Cleveland & Chicago Railroad," Blake suggested. "Don't you suppose he could give Brown something to do?"

"He could if he would."

"I guess he will, all right. Dad and he are great friends. We'll stop in and see him after lunch."

Blake heaved a sigh, as if thankful to get the matter over with.

"There, that's settled," he exclaimed. "Now I'll draw a check for the doctor's bill, and we can leave this rather dismal subject. How much did you say it was?"

"Two hundred and twenty," Macdonald returned. "But look here, John, there's no sense in your settling the whole of it. If he has this position——"

"He'll want every cent he makes to scrape along on," broke in the young chap, reaching for his check book. "I'm still a bit leary about three dollars a day putting a man in Rockefeller's class. I'll just make it three hundred, and that'll cover some of those other bills you spoke of."

He wrote rapidly for a moment, blotted the check, tore it out, and handed it to his friend.

"By Jove! This is corking of you, John," the latter exclaimed. "Brown won't be able to believe his eyes——"

"Cut it out, Mac—do!" interrupted Blake, standing up and walking to the window. "You know I can't spend my allowance, and it would be a great pity if this mathematical genius should have to make cans, or whatever he does, all his life. Come on and let's go down to Blagdon's for lunch. It's my last day, and I want to enjoy it before I'm landed at school."

Macdonald gave in at once and, sprucing himself up a bit, joined Blake in the hall.

He was not a little fond of this young fellow, in

spite of certain faults and marked peculiarities. They had met two years before in Pasadena and, notwithstanding the difference in age, had become good friends.

When Blake wrote that he had decided to enter the American School of Athletic Development, and would shortly be leaving California for that purpose, the doctor at once invited him to visit at his home in Cleveland. That visit was now at an end, to their mutual regret, the young chap having planned to leave by the night train, which would get him to Bloomfield the first thing in the morning.

They had lunch at Blagdon's, and afterward visited the office of Colonel Snowden, who readily promised Blake to do something for the crippled Brown.

That satisfactorily settled, they went to a vaudeville show, had a pleasant supper together, and then drove to the station.

The train was almost on the point of departing when Blake, who was standing on the step saying a last few things to his friend, suddenly remembered something.

"Now don't go telling my name to Brown," he admonished. "I've been awfully glad to help him out, but I don't want to be overwhelmed with thanks and all that sort of thing."

"But he'll want to know who he's indebted to for so much," Macdonald protested.

The train started slowly, and Blake leaned forward, holding fast to the railing.

"I don't care," he retorted. "I won't be bothered. Tell him it's an 'Unknown Benefactor,' or an 'Anony-

mous Friend.' That's the way those things are put in the newspapers."

Running along beside the train, Macdonald laughed in spite of himself.

"All right," he called. "Have your own way. I won't tell him. By-by! and don't forget to write."

"I won't. Good-by."

The train was whirled out of sight, and the doctor walked slowly back through the station.

"He's a dandy kid," he mused. "If only he could get rid of—— But, pshaw! Nobody's perfect."

CHAPTER XIII.

JOHN HUNTINGDON BLAKE ARRIVES.

The arrival of John Huntingdon Blake at Farnham Hall created something of a stir. Any boy showing up late is sure to receive more or less attention; but when he is preceded by a number of gigantic crates and boxes, to say nothing of several mammoth trunks of the latest and most approved style, curiosity and speculation concerning who and what he is become rampant.

"His stuff is piled up in the room so's you can hardly walk around it," announced one youth importantly. "I saw them putting the boxes in there."

"What's in 'em all?" inquired another. "Might think he was going to furnish a whole house."

"Maybe he's agent for some sporting goods house," suggested a third.

He was laughed to scorn; but no one else could think of any plausible excuse for a student having such an extraordinary number of belongings, so they had to possess their souls in patience and await the owner's arrival.

In the meantime, however, various contradictory stories as to who he was were bruited about in the greatest profusion. One opined that his father was a great railroad magnate, with a winter home in California. Another advanced the theory that the elder Blake was the owner of immense orange groves in

that State of fruit and flowers. Still a third, who had heard the name associated with a famous brand of pickles, was perfectly certain that the unknown student was a scion of that family, and that the boxes contained samples of the various delectable preserves for free distribution about the school. His following was decidedly the strongest.

Somehow the idea of unlimited pickles and jams appealed strongly to many.

"Fattty" Benkard positively drooled at the mouth whenever he thought of it, and longed for the speedy arrival of this benefactor of the human stomach.

When at length John Huntingdon Blake actually did arrive, the first impression was something of a disappointment. The boys, dawdling curiously around Frank Merriwell's office, saw a slim, well set up youth of sixteen or seventeen, dressed in a suit of inconspicuous gray, a gray overcoat, gray gloves, and a glossy black derby. There seemed nothing striking or unusual about him, nothing which savored of railroads or oranges, or—alas!—pickles.

But after he had disappeared behind the office door and impressions began to sink in, they realized that this newcomer was decidedly unusual, after all. Few of them had ever seen a fellow of his age so well groomed. There was a finished perfection about him, a harmony of dress and appointment, a certain air, which was most impressive.

"He's a swell, all right," commented Ralph Shearman, who came from New York and might be supposed to know.

"Humph!" grunted George Peterson. "I don't see

anything swell about him. Why, that tie he had on wasn't a bit pretty."

"Maybe not—according to your taste," jibed Shearman. "But I'll bet it cost three dollars if it cost a cent."

Benkard's eyes widened.

"Oh, g'wan!" he protested. "Who ever heard of a tie costing three dollars. Why, I could buy a pair of shoes for that."

"Not a pair like Blake's," Shearman smiled. "Nor for three times three. He's a swell, all right, whether he's railroads, or pickles, or nothing at all."

The door opened suddenly, and Frank Merriwell looked out into the hall.

"Ah, Shearman," he said, as his eyes fell upon the New York boy. "Just step in here for a moment, will you?"

Shearman did so, with alacrity, only too thankful to see something further of the new boy. He found the latter standing beside a chair, over the back of which was thrown the gray overcoat, thus giving a glimpse of its silk lining.

Blake acknowledged the introduction with perfect self-possession, in which there was no trace of condescension; and when Merry asked Shearman to show the newcomer over the school a little, and lend him a hand if necessary in opening his boxes, he was even slightly apologetic for the trouble he was causing.

"I really don't need any help," he said. "If I can have a hammer or something to open them with, I'll get along all right alone."

"It isn't a bit of trouble," Shearman protested hastily. "I'd just as soon do it as not."

Which was perfectly true, though Ralph was not specially noted for his eagerness to do things for others. The present case, however, was an exception. Not for anything would he miss this chance of getting ahead of the others and being the first to find out just what the much-discussed cases and boxes contained.

A moment later, the two boys emerged into the hall.

Shearman led his companion swiftly toward the stairs, regardless of the general forward movement of the curious boys. His maneuver was successful. He hurried Blake along, followed by envious glances from the youths who had expected an introduction.

"Which do you want to do first—look the place over, or unpack?" he asked, stopping at the first corridor.

"Unpack," Blake declared unhesitatingly. "I can't settle down comfortably till my things are straightened out. I can see the school any time."

This suited Shearman admirably. The rôle of guide did not appeal to him, and, if he had judged correctly, by the time the newcomer's baggage was unpacked and the boxes opened, the inspection of the school would have to be put off to another time.

"That's fine," he returned. "I'll get a hammer and chisel from Snoopy. He has 'em in his room. Where are you booked for? What corridor, I mean."

Blake consulted a piece of paper Merriwell had given him.

"South corridor, second floor," he read. "The room is sixteen."

Shearman sighed a bit enviously.

"You're in luck," he commented. "That's the best corridor in the school."

"Best rooms, you mean?"

"N-o, not specially. All the rooms are pretty much alike, with a few exceptions. But the best fellows are in that corridor. Phillips and Shasta and the rest of the football bunch. You play?"

"Now and then," returned Blake. "I suppose it's too late to do anything at it now."

"Just about," Shearman agreed, turning the corner into the south corridor. "Regular and scrub are both made up, though if you're a wonder you'd stand a chance of being put on."

"I'm not that at all," Blake laughed. "I've never done very much at it. Tennis and horseback riding appeal to me more as exercises."

Shearman, who had never been on a horse in his life, was instantly in as perfect accord with his new friend as if he owned a stableful.

"Finest sport going," he agreed. "I always do it when I'm home. Well, here's sixteen. Got your key?"

The room was fairly large, with two windows, and an alcove for the bed; but it was choked with the boxes, crates, and trunks which filled it.

Blake looked around in dismay.

"Great Scott!" he murmured. "I had no idea I'd sent so much. What in the world will I do with it all?"

Not knowing what "it" was, Ralph could offer no suggestions; but he hastened off at once to borrow hammer and chisel from the tutor, on the floor above. When he returned, Blake had shed coat and vest, thus exposing a silk shirt with an elaborate monogram on the left cuff, and a more extended view of the quite, but very costly, scarf.

Shearman wasted little time in their examination. He was more interested in the boxes, which he attacked with a vigor and enthusiasm that would have surprised those who knew him well.

The contents of the first one to be revealed was a picture. It was rather large, and looked decidedly old. On standing it carefully against the wall, it was seen to be a portrait in oils of an imposing-looking old man in some sort of uniform, bearing a row of medals and orders on his breast.

"Admiral Blake," the new boy explained casually. "One of my ancestors who lived back in sixteen hundred. The portrait's been handed down in our family."

Shearman looked blank, and made no comment as he attacked the next box. It, likewise, proved to be a portrait—Lady Constance Blake, daughter of the Earl of Talbot, who, it appeared, was a daughter-in-law of the admiral.

Perspiring freely, and growing more and more disappointed, Shearman successively brought to light Sir Guy Blake, governor of Bermuda; General John Blake, one of Washington's staff during the Revolution; and John Huntingdon Blake, secretary of state under one of the early presidents.

The owner of all these ancestors explained them in a casually indifferent manner, as if such things were a matter of course, a tone which was distinctly trying to a youth who had never assayed to climb farther into the family tree than the sturdy branch represented by his paternal grandfather, a sagacious farmer, who had bought land in Brooklyn during the fifties and sold it forty years later at an increase of some three thousand per cent.

Besides the ancestors, there were several other smaller pictures, quantities of photographs, all sorts of small furnishings which add attractiveness to a boy's room, and a great many books.

In the trunks, which Blake was busily emptying, were clothes, more clothes, and then some.

To Shearman's dazed senses it seemed as if there must have been twenty suits, and at least that many pair of shoes, while shirts, neckties, and the like were to be counted by dozens instead of singly.

One thing was evident: Whether Blake was railroads or orange groves or pickles, he certainly had money to burn; and Ralph made up his mind on the spot that if there was any cremations of that description going on he would do his best to help along the conflagration.

When everything was unpacked and unboxed, the room looked as if a cyclone had struck it.

"You'll have a time getting things straightened out," Shearman ventured.

"It won't be so bad, once all these boxes and things are cleared up," Blake returned cheerfully. "I suppose there's a man around the place who'll do it?"

Shearman looked doubtful. There were several men who looked after furnaces and did other chores around the school, but they were not supposed to be at the beck and call of every boy who wanted his room cleared up.

"Well, I don't know," he returned. "They don't usually——"

"Pshaw!" laughed Blake carelessly. "They'll do anything for a couple of dollars. If you're going down, would you mind asking some one to step up right away?"

Stifling an impulse to offer to undertake the job himself for that munificent reward, Shearman acquiesced and left the room with some reluctance.

He disliked, on principle, letting go the slight hold he held on the new boy by virtue of the help he had rendered him; and he was anxious to make plans for their further acquaintance. Blake, however, while thanking him cordially for what he had done, dexterously evaded anything in the nature of an entanglement; and Ralph was obliged to depart in a somewhat disgruntled frame of mind.

Turning the corner into the central corridor, he ran into his cronies grouped around the stairs, and was instantly stopped.

"Well?" inquired Peterson curiously.

"Did you find out what's in 'em?" put in another eagerly.

"Are they pickles?" demanded Fatty Benkard, his eyes distended and mouth fairly watering at the thought.

Shearman's lips curled.

"Pickles!" he snapped. "I should say not! They're mostly ancestors."

There was an impressive pause.

"Aunt's sisters?" gasped Benkard, his jaw dropping.

"No, you fathead!" retorted Shearman. "Ancestors. Pictures of his great grandfathers, and all that. He's got bunches of 'em."

There was another pause, fraught with considerable emotion.

"Is his father the orange king?" finally ventured one disappointedly.

"He didn't say," Ralph returned. "But I'll tell you this much, fellows: He's got the coin, all right—wads and wads of it. You ought to see his clothes. Trunks full of suits and shoes and everything. The closet's stuffed so's you couldn't squeeze another thing in if you tried. What's more, he's going to give Sour Ball two dollars for taking the rubbish and empty trunks downstairs."

Instantly there was an indignant stir. "Sour Ball" was the euphonious cognomen which had been bestowed upon one Higgins, head janitor, and the thought of all that money being wasted on the hated being was heart-rending.

"Two dollars!" gasped Peterson. "Why the mischief didn't you offer to do it yourself, Ralph?"

"Sure!" echoed Benkard excitedly. "We—we'll help you."

Shearman scowled.

"You're welcome to make the offer yourselves," he retorted. "I know I won't. He's got a—er—well,

a way about him that didn't encourage a chap. I'd be willing to bet he'd thank you, and then not shell out."

"A tightwad?" demanded Peterson, with a frown.

"N-o. I don't think he's that. I've got an idea he might think he was insulting you by offering money."

"Too bad," murmured Peterson, his face falling. "Well, we won't risk it, then. I'd fall dead if I had to tote that stuff downstairs for nothing. Better run along after Sour Ball, Ralph. We'll have to dope out some other scheme for separating that swell from the dough."

CHAPTER XIV.

A MATTER OF ANCESTORS.

The separation of John Huntingdon Blake from his surplus cash did not prove to be such an easy matter. From the first, Shearman had doubts on the subject. During his brief acquaintance with the new boy he had seized him up as a chap who would be anything but an easy mark; and that impression was strengthened with the passing of time.

Blake was anything but niggardly. He did not fling his money about in a reckless, haphazard manner, but he was always ready to treat his friends at the general store, to help them out with loans when they were hard up, or share with them in any way whatever the advantage his extremely large allowance gave him.

Unfortunately for Shearman and Peterson and most of their crowd, they were not included in the new boy's circle of intimates. Quietly, but with firmness of purpose rather unusual in one of his age, Blake proceeded to make friends with only the fellows who pleased his fastidious taste, eliminating all others in a manner which was positively masterful.

He was never rude, but he had a way which was unmistakable of showing a boy that he did not measure up to the required standard. That standard was family, though a good many fellows did not realize it for some time.

It was a fact, nevertheless. Unless a boy was of good birth and had ancestors behind him, he was forced to remain on the outskirts without even having the consolation of knowing just why he had failed to make good.

It would have been difficult indeed for most fellows thus to pick and choose, and Blake would never have succeeded had he been possessed of breeding and money alone.

Boys, as a rule, care nothing about family trees. Their standard is usually accomplishment. They judge by what a chap has done, or what he is.

They might have been a little impressed by the show made by John Huntingdon Blake. They would possibly have felt some slight degree of envy at the sight of a fellow possessed of no less than eight different suits of clothes and a dozen pairs of shoes, with the remainder of his wardrobe in proportion. It was quite likely that many sighed at the thought of what it must be like to have an unlimited supply of money and be accountable to no one in the expenditure thereof. But these things alone could never in the world insure their liking.

Happily for Blake, he possessed a charm of manner which was almost irresistible. When he chose to exert himself, he proved so pleasant and agreeable that he was voted instantly to be a good sort, though he did have rather finicky ideas about ancestors, and was enormously, disgustingly wealthy.

It thus happened that he progressed rapidly along the lines he had laid out, and before long had become

on intimate terms with all the fellows he considered worth having as friends.

His location in South Corridor was a great advantage, for here roomed many of the nicest chaps in school. He speedily became almost chummy with Gavin Minturn, who had the tower room, and had furnished it with a taste quite equal to Blake's. Then there was Jim Phillips, captain of the eleven, who was from his own home State, though the two had never happened to hear of each other before. Big, quiet Garrett Strawbridge, from Boston, was another. And though Strawbridge had never paid but slight attention to his family tree before, Blake's interest in the matter induced him to write a letter of inquiry which caused no little surprise and amusement among the home circle. In their reply, however, they were able to assure him that he numbered among his forbears several Revolutionary generals, a colonial governor, and one of the *Mayflower* passengers.

"Though why this sudden interest, we are unable to fathom," his mother wrote. "People of our sort usually take those things for granted, don't they?"

In addition to the good qualities already mentioned, Blake proved himself to be accomplished in rather unusual ways. He played an almost invincible game of tennis. Early in his stay, he inquired of Frank Merriwell about the hiring of a riding horse, and, discovering that the boy was a splendid horseman, Merry allowed him the run of the stable. The privilege was never abused, for Blake knew all about horses, and was able to handle with ease the most spirited mount.

He had a good voice, and could play both the man-

dolin and the guitar well. His fund of amusing stories seemed inexhaustible, and, taken all in all, he was voted a distinct addition to the school. His room became a sort of center where fellows dropped in at all hours, sure that there would be something doing.

It thus happened that, on a certain rainy afternoon, when even football practice was out of the question, quite a crowd had assembled there. They were mostly of the élite, though one or two outsiders had blundered in, and were being subjected to the delicate, but extremely effective, freezing-out process which Blake did not hesitate to practice on those of whom he did not approve.

Chief among them to-day was a certain "Red" Moran, big, robust, with the temper which usually accompanies a florid complexion. That temper was, in fact, what had barred him from the football team; for it was hot, and quite without control, and was accompanied by other unpleasant qualities, such as brag and bluster, and—some said—the tendencies of a bully.

Just why he should have shown up here to-day was a problem. He was sore on most of the crowd because of his rejection by Phillips, captain of the team, and he was not at all the sort of fellow to be attracted by John Blake. Very likely it was sheer perversity of spirit, the sort of thing which makes a man butt in where he knows well enough he is not wanted. And, having once come unasked and unwelcomed, he at once proceeded to make himself as disagreeable as possible.

Having inspected everything in the room in that

contemptuous, half-tolerant manner which is irritating, he paused before the portrait of Admiral Blake, and stood contemplating it, both hands in his pockets, swaying gently back and forth on his heels.

"Who's this old geezer, Blake?" he inquired presently, in a sneering tone.

Blake glanced over from where he was sitting on the window seat, strumming a guitar.

"That happens to be one of my ancestors," he returned quietly.

He had explained the relationship not long before to one of the other boys, and he knew Moran had heard him then. Nevertheless, his face showed nothing of the annoyance he felt at the fellow's manner.

Moran shrugged his shoulders.

"Homely-looking guy," he commented.

"That's a matter of opinion," Blake answered, striking a chord or two on his mandolin. "Perhaps your own are better looking."

Moran's face flushed. The only ancestor he knew anything about was a father in the contracting business in Chicago, who could neither read nor write, though he had succeeded in amassing considerable money by his native shrewdness.

"Maybe they are," Red retorted. "But I don't have any use for 'em."

Blake stifled a smile with poor success.

"In-deed!" he commented blandly.

He could convey a vast deal of expression and meaning in a few words, and Moran's flush deepened at the other's tone.

"I don't know anything about 'em, and I don't want to know," he snapped.

Blake raised his eyebrows.

"Really?" he queried. "I hope there's nothing wrong about them?"

There was a covert sarcasm in his voice which made the hot-tempered chap turn swiftly on him, with a fierce scowl.

"The fact that you've got a lot of chromos like that hanging around don't make you a scrap better than I am," he exclaimed angrily.

"Did I say I was?" Blake inquired calmly.

It was an absurdly trivial thing to lose his temper about, but Moran's control was very slight, and he lost it altogether on the least provocation. Blake's manner was also unquestionably irritating. It was not so much what he said as the way in which he said it that made every word sting.

"Maybe you didn't say so, but it's what you think?" Moran rasped.

"Ye-es? Getting to be quite a mind reader, aren't you?"

Moran took a step or two forward, his eyes blazing.

"Mind reader or not, it's true!" he snapped. "Every minute I've been in this room you've been acting as if I wasn't good enough to wipe your feet on. If that's——"

"Just a minute," Blake interrupted calmly. "Did I ask you to come into this room?"

"Maybe you didn't!" retorted the angry chap. "I didn't know you was such a great piece of work that a fellow had to get written permission to come in here.

Now that I know, you won't catch me here again, I can tell you."

"Charmed, I'm sure," murmured Blake, in a tone which made Don Shasta, quarter back on the team, grin suddenly.

That grin was in the nature of a last straw. Like most dictatorial persons, Moran hated, above everything else, to be laughed at. He knew himself to be in the wrong; but that was lost sight of in the wrath that assailed him at this fresh insult.

"I'll show you who's the best man," he frothed, springing forward and doubling his fists. "Just stand up here for five minutes and I'll larrup the hide off you."

Blake did not stir a muscle. With one hand, he continued to pick out a soft air on the mandolin. His eyes were fixed fearlessly on the heavy, square, inflamed countenance of the contractor's son. The other fellows, all agog with interest, watched him admiringly.

"You want to fight?" he asked coolly.

"What in time do you think I was after?" demanded the other fiercely.

"I wasn't quite sure," Blake murmured. "You act as if you were just a little off your head."

Moran choked apoplectically.

"Will you put up your fists?" he roared; "or do you want me to make you?"

Blake's face underwent a curious change. The eyes narrowed ominously, and the muscles of his jaw seemed to harden.

"Neither!" he retorted crisply, rising to his feet so

suddenly that Moran stepped back instinctively. "Kindly leave the room."

"You won't fight?" Moran gasped incredulously.

"I will not—here."

"You coward! You—you——"

"That will do for you," Blake interrupted, in an icy voice. "If you're so set on it, I'll meet you in the gym any time to-morrow you like. In the meantime, be good enough to leave this room."

"You——"

"Leave the room!"

Moran hesitated, glaring at this extraordinary youth in helpless rage. Then, moved by he knew not what impulse, he whirled around and strode to the door.

"I'll be in the gym at five to-morrow," he rasped. "If you're not there——"

"Oh, I'll be there," interrupted Blake wearily. "I do wish you would go away and leave us in peace."

Without another word, Moran jerked open the door, dashed out, and slammed it behind him.

Blake stepped forward and replaced a photograph which had been dislodged from the bookshelf. As he turned back to the group around the window, his face expressed nothing but polite regret.

"I'm beastly sorry this happened," he said. "But with a person like that, what can you do?"

CHAPTER XV.

AN UNINTENDED SLUR.

No one spoke for a moment or two, but several pairs of eyes were fixed curiously on the new boy. Was he really as nonchalant as he seemed, or was he throwing a magnificent, colossal bluff?

"Don't mind us," Shasta hastened to assure him, the next instant. "I'm only a bit sorry you've got mixed up with Moran. For all his brag and bluster, that tarrier is pretty smooth with his fists."

Blake smiled a little as he picked up the mandolin and resumed his seat. If he were bluffing, he certainly had wonderful nerves.

"I should imagine he might be," he commented, almost indifferently. "He has the look of a boxer. I don't suppose he's anything to be afraid of, though. A chap who loses his temper that easy doesn't usually last long in a bout."

Phillips shook his head doubtfully.

"He's got a tremendous reach and the strength of a bull," he commented. "Besides, there's nothing the matter with his science, either."

Blake shrugged his shoulders.

"Still, his temper is a big handicap," he objected.

"Maybe so; but unless you box—you do box, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, more or less," returned Blake indifferently. "But let's change the subject. I haven't any

use for a fellow like that, who's common as they make them, and is all the time thrusting his way in where he isn't wanted. I could never agree with the statement in the Declaration of Independence which says that all men are created equal. They're not—they can't be. Moran is a perfect example of the falsity of it. He can't trace his family any farther back than his grandfather, I'd be willing to bet. He's common and ordinary, and the fact sticks out all over him and shows up in everything he does. Why a fellow who had——"

He stopped abruptly, and a look of annoyance flashed across his face. From the other side of the room, where he had been sitting out of sight and forgotten behind a table laden with books and a shaded reading lamp, arose the second uninvited member of the party, a tall, thin, awkward youth of sixteen, clothed in shabby, decidedly ill-fitting garments.

His face was flushed scarlet, and, as he came slowly forward, he bit his lips.

"I—think I'll be going—now," he stammered, his eyes fixed on John Huntingdon Blake.

The latter's cheeks were faintly pink, and there was a look very like embarrassment on his face.

"I'd—er—forgotten you were here—a—Brown," he returned, with an attempt at lightness. "You were so quiet, you know, that I thought you'd slipped off before."

"No," said Brown, somewhat stiffly. "I've been sitting right there."

He emphasized the last words slightly, and then,

without further delay, departed, closing the door carefully behind him.

There was a momentary silence, which was broken by Blake.

"Hang it all!" he exclaimed, in a tone of vexation. "I had no idea he was there. I thought he'd gone long ago."

"So did I," Shasta agreed. "That lamp shade covered him up completely."

"Who is he, anyhow, John?" Phillips inquired. "Friend of yours? I haven't seen him around before."

Blake smiled in whimsical annoyance.

"Nor I, until this morning," he said. "I have a notion he's just come. He has the look. We sat together in history this morning, and I spoke to him because he seemed to look so sort of lonely and out of place. If I'd had the least idea he would show up here this afternoon I'd have kept my mouth shut."

"He doesn't seem such an awful bad sort," put in Strawbridge. "Outgrown his clothes, and all that, but he hasn't a bad face."

Blake laughed, and strummed a bit on the mandolin.

"Perhaps not," he agreed. "But neither is he thrillingly interesting. Worst of all, his name is—Brown."

"Not very distinctive, I'll admit," Phillips remarked, rather seriously. "There are some very nice Browns, however."

"Of course. But I'm afraid he doesn't belong to that branch of the family. Just the same, I'm blamed sorry I didn't see him over there. I hate to hurt a fellow's feelings deliberately, and I'm afraid he was

hurt at what I was saying about Moran. The two aren't in the same class at all, but this chap looks as if he came from a middle-class family, and, from his expression, I imagine he must have taken what I said about Moran to be aimed at him, too."

Shasta yawned.

"Oh, well, what's the odds?" he said carelessly. "Life's too short to waste time on people you don't care a snap about, and never will, and I shouldn't say Brown was your kind at all."

Blake smiled a little, and struck a chord or two on the mandolin. His eyes were still serious, however.

"I don't imagine so, either," he agreed. "Still, I'm sorry if his feelings are hurt."

"He'll get over it." Shasta shrugged. "What about this fight with Red Moran? That's a heap more interesting. Do you really think you can lick him, John?"

Blake laughed.

"I'm sure I don't know," he returned lightly. "I've never seen him with the gloves on."

"I wish we could be there," the quarter back said regretfully. "Can't you put it off till after practice?"

"Surely," Blake smiled. "Anything to be agreeable. I hereby tender all present an invitation to the affair. Only you mustn't expect anything wonderful, you know."

They accepted, with alacrity, and promised to hustle over to the gym the minute practice was over, Phillips even saying that he would finish a bit earlier, if he could. There was a little more laughter and joshing,

and then they trailed out of the room to wash up for supper.

After they had gone, Blake lit the lamps, and, leaning against the table, stared up at the painted visage of Admiral Blake. For a long time he stood there, his face as inscrutable and his eyes as unwavering as those of his illustrious ancestor.

At last he gave a sigh, and turned away. Perhaps he was thinking with indignation of the uncalled-for manner in which the lowborn Moran had insulted the dead-and-gone worthy of Charles the First's time. Perhaps he was regretting his own unintentional humiliation of the plebeian Brown. Whether either of these things was in his mind, or something quite different, it was impossible to say.

At all events, he sighed.

CHAPTER XVI.

GEORGE BROWN.

George Brown hurried down the corridor from Blake's room, his face flaming and his lips pressed tightly together to keep back the torrent of indignation which was ready to burst forth.

"He's a cad!" he muttered between his clenched teeth, as he rounded the corner and started up to his own floor. "He said it on purpose. He knew all the time that I was in the room. He's a beastly cad!"

The blow came all the harder because, in the classroom, Blake had really been very nice to him. He had been feeling homesick and lonely, for he was not a boy who made friends quickly, and he had arrived only that morning.

There had been the usual critical inspection of him by various boys in the hallways and other places where little knots gathered at odd times, but Blake was the first one to speak pleasantly to him, and brace him up.

Until a little while ago, it had never occurred to him that he was doing anything out of the way in going to the room that afternoon. The day was rainy, and it was impossible to do anything out of doors, so he had fancied it perfectly natural that he should run up to see the fellow who had been so decent and who had seemed so friendly.

The appearance of the room awed him a little, for he was quite unaccustomed to the elegancies of life.

The fellows who were gathered there were also a bit bewildering. Short as was the time since his arrival, he had had the captain of the eleven pointed out as one of the big men. He also knew the quarter back by sight, and to meet them thus was a trifle flustering.

It was not, however, until the blustering entrance of Red Moran that Brown began to feel doubts as to what he had done. He was no fool, and not one of the veiled remarks uttered so lightly and unconcernedly by his host escaped him. Moran himself, against whom they were leveled, did not understand half of them, but Brown was not so slow-witted.

Sitting behind the table, whither he had retired almost at once, he heard and fathomed the purpose behind those words. He realized, also—vaguely at first, but with rapidly increasing clearness—the point of view of the chap he had liked in the classroom that morning. Bit by bit he pieced together a complete whole, and as he patched he grew more and more bitter.

He did not quite approve of Moran's blustering, chip-on-the-shoulder attitude. Intuitively he felt that it was not good manners, nor even ordinarily decent, to go into a fellow's room and criticize the furnishings of it, to say nothing of the chap himself. And yet, all the time he had sympathized with the intruder. Blake's "freezing-out" policy had been so evident from the very first that Brown felt that the red-haired youth would have been more than human not to resent it.

"Blake showed, from the very minute Moran came in, that he thought himself the better man," the humiliated boy said aloud, after he had reached his

room. "I shouldn't blame any one for getting mad and wanting to fight, especially any one with as little self-control as Red. I'd like to fight him myself, for he meant it all for me, too, though he tried to throw the bluff that he'd forgotten I was in the room."

He took a stride or two across the room, his face still flushed and indignant.

"He isn't a bit better than either of us," he resumed, a moment later. "What if he has got money and family? What if he can hang up a lot of pictures of his ancestors on the walls? Like as not some of them were thieves, or worse. A fellow ought to be judged by what he is, not by the number of generations he can trace his family back, and I claim he isn't as good as I am. He's a cad, for no gentleman would deliberately sneer at a fellow and hurt his feelings, just because he doesn't happen to have money or social position."

The boy paused in his rapid pacing of the room before the photographs of his father and mother prominently displayed on the bookshelf. There was nothing ornamental about them. They were just plain working people.

His father's hands were calloused and rough with toil. His face was lined and weather-beaten from exposure in all sorts of weather. He looked awkwardly conscious in the "Sunday suit." The mother's hands were rough, too, for she had worked hard for many years to raise four sons.

The boy's eyes were a little moist as he gazed upon the pictured faces. He loved them dearly, and he was not ashamed of what they were. He was proud

of them, and intensely grateful for the sacrifices they had made in order that their eldest son might have the education he had always craved.

He knew how hurt and indignant they would be if they had any idea of the humiliation that son had suffered, for they had always held George the least bit in awe. Already, at seventeen, he had more book learning than they had ever acquired, and they deemed him the equal of any one in the whole wide world. Privately, they cherished the belief that he could accomplish whatever he set his mind on, and George would not have disabused them of this innocent belief for anything.

He made up his mind never to hint to them of the treatment he had received at the hands of John Huntingdon Blake. He would even try to forget it himself.

Unfortunately, he could not. Though he grew calmer, the sting remained, and with it was a touch of something like envy. He did not realize it himself, and had he been accused of such a thing he would have indignantly denied it.

Nevertheless, it was true. He envied Blake his suave, perfectly self-possessed manner. He envied him the facility with which he made friends and gathered around him some of the best fellows in the school. He even envied—for Brown was very human—the power unlimited wealth always seems to bring; and, stranger, perhaps, than anything else, was the fact that he began to think of his own ancestors, and wish he knew a little more about them.

He remembered his grandfather, a Long Island

farmer, but vaguely. In the press of other more urgent and vital things, the matter had received scant attention in the Brown household.

When one is straining every effort to bring up a family of four children with robust appetites, and the common habit of outgrowing, or outwearing, their clothes at an appalling rate, there is little time left for the consideration of family or ancestors. The pressing, vital present elbows the dead-and-gone past into the background, from which it is likely never to emerge until fortune smiles and leisure moments become more frequent.

Nevertheless, Brown remembered having heard, somewhere, that the farmers of Long Island are noted for their pedigrees. At that point, however, he realized the trend of his thoughts, and dropped the subject abruptly, with a frown of annoyance.

"I'm a fool!" he said aloud. "As if it made a bit of difference. It's all tommyrot! I'll bet our friend would never think any more of us if we had a family tree a mile long."

His face softened a little as he let his mind dwell on the one entrancing mystery of his life. It had all been so wonderful, so unexpected, so like one of those things which occur so often in fiction and so seldom in real life, that to this day he would sometimes awake in the middle of the night with an awful fear that it had not happened at all—that it was nothing but a dream.

The memory would be always with him of that dreadful day when his father was injured, and of those other, scarcely less horrible, days and weeks and

months which followed. He could never forget the period of suspense, of waiting, which had added years to the bowed shoulders of his mother, and lines of care to her face. And when at last the news came that his father would live, a cripple, it was but the beginning of their troubles.

Long weeks of pinching and scraping followed, in which the little hoard at the bank dwindled lower and lower and finally was gone.

Eagerly, but with a sickening sense of despair and failure, he had relinquished every hope, every ambition, in his desire to lighten the weight of care his mother bore with such brave patience.

That period at the canning factory was like a nightmare. He was out of place in such company, but he never murmured. Yet, sometimes, as he thought of those long years stretching out before him, monotonous, deadening, with nothing ever to look forward to but grinding, manual labor, when his whole soul cried out for higher, broader things, the mental pain was almost unendurable.

These various phases of misfortune had all been fraught with various emotions; but, one and all, they faded into nothing when compared with the rapturous thrill that came with his release.

In a breath, every trouble and worry had vanished like a mist fading before the midsummer sun.

A job, paying more than he had obtained in his palmiest days, had been found for the father. That haunting millstone of a doctor's bill was wiped off as swiftly and completely as chalk under a wet sponge, besides leaving enough surplus to settle the most press-

ing of the other bills. George need no longer slave away his life in the factory, but could proceed at once with his education.

It was as if some magician had waved his wand and transformed everything. Doctor Macdonald, who had been the means of bringing all this happiness about, told them that their benefactor was some one who was interested in the family, but who preferred keeping his identity to himself.

The Brown family never inquired further into the particulars. To them the slightest wish of this wonderful person was sacred. They did not even know whether it was a man or a woman who had so transformed their lives; but they guessed it to be the former, from a chance remark of the doctor's.

But if ever a human being was given the attributes of a divinity, it was this unknown.

The Browns presently came to calling him "our friend," but even among themselves their voices were just a little awestruck and hushed when they talked of him. There was not a day when the thankful mother or the more taciturn, but equally grateful, father, did not call down blessings upon his head.

It was George, however, more than any of the others, who thought of him the most. He had a good deal of imagination, and he was constantly evolving in his mind little dramas in which some day he would discover the identity of the man he almost reverenced and be in a position where he could repay, to some slight degree, the debt.

He credited the unknown with virtues which, though he did not realize it, would have made any person

possessing them an insufferable prig. He drew, in fact, a mental picture of a morally perfect being, and every night he prayed, sincerely, fervently, for the happiness of the one who had transformed his life.

"Our friend would never think of family," he repeated. "He couldn't be such a cad as Blake if he tried. He's too fine, too good, too—— Oh, too much of a gentleman."

Presently he dropped into a chair, and let his mind, as most people will, wander back to the unpleasant topic. He told himself that he was a fool to be bothered by such a fellow as Blake. There were plenty of other boys he could make his friends. He could go through the year without so much as speaking to the man who had humiliated him.

Try as he would, however, the thing stuck in his mind. It was like a tiny thorn which has penetrated the skin, and presently, festering, grows more and more painful. One ends by removing the thorn at the cost of some extra sharp twinges, or else lets it stay to hurt dully and constantly.

Brown let it stay.

Before the bell summoned the school to supper, he was hating John Huntingdon Brown with an intensity just a little out of proportion to the cause.

"He's a beastly cad," he said to himself, forgetting with decided lack of originality. "No fellow who's a gentleman would do what he's done."

Halfway down the hall he stopped abruptly.

"I just hope Moran licks him to a standstill," he said viciously. "It'll serve the conceited fool good and right, and I'd like to see it done."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FIGHT.

Any rumor of a fight usually circulates like wildfire, particularly in a school; but the proposed encounter between Red Moran and the new boy, Blake, proved to be an exception to the general rule.

By mutual consent, the fellows who had been present at the quarrel kept silent. Encounters of that kind did not meet with the approval of Frank Merriwell, and they were afraid that if knowledge of it leaked out a stop would be put to it at once.

They were not anxious for that to happen. They knew that if Moran was prevented from fighting, his attitude would become insufferable. He would crow over Blake at every opportunity, probably alleging that he had brought about the thing on purpose to avoid being licked.

There was a decided curiosity, also, to see what Blake could really do with his fists. So far the new boy had shown comparatively little athletic ability. He played a corking game of tennis, to be sure, and rode a horse with the skill of a cow-puncher; but these things were not considered so important as some other accomplishments.

Football and baseball ranked first, of course, and Blake had done nothing at either sport. When questioned, he said he played them both a little, but, having arrived too late to try for the eleven, there had been

no opportunity for showing of what that little consisted. His manner of speaking of what he had done on the diamond and track, however, did not warrant the belief that he was particularly accomplished in either of these major sports.

Among the minor sports—if it can be classed as such—the boys at Farnham Hall considered boxing of the first importance.

Merriwell had a great faith in the efficacy of the art, both as an exercise and as an accomplishment. He argued, too, that the more skillful a gentleman was with the gloves the less likely he would be to give rein to a quarrelsome disposition.

The theory had been carried out to such an extent in the school that every boy received a thorough grounding in the science, and regular boxing contests were a prominent feature all through the winter.

Among those who had taken early to the sport with the greatest enthusiasm was Red Moran. He had had some good teachers before coming to Bloomfield, and had shown himself the superior of almost every fellow in school.

If Blake showed himself the better man, his standing would be increased and his position assured; for it is an undoubted fact that a fellow may be ever so entertaining, accomplished, and pleasant, but he never really "belongs" until he has made good in some field of athletics.

It was this same fear of interruption, probably, which caused Moran to inform only a few particular friends of the forthcoming event, and swear them to secrecy. There was no atom of a doubt in his mind

as to the result; but he had so set his heart on pounding the Californian to a pulp that he would not have had the affair stopped for anything.

The result was that, just before dusk, when football practice was dismissed and the fellows had made a bee line for the house to get first in the showers, four of them lingered behind and presently might have been seen hastening toward the gym with equal speed.

At the door they were joined by Blake himself, cool and unconcerned as ever, together with Victor Rives and Beverly Byrd, two boys who did not play football, but who had been present the day before at the quarrel.

Hurrying in, they discovered Moran and his friends waiting impatiently, while on the outskirts of the group, leaning silently against the wall, stood George Brown.

The time was short, so things were rushed along with all possible speed. Moran had already picked out his gloves, and Blake lost no time in finding a pair for himself and stripping to his undershirt, as his opponent had done. Both men wore rubber-soled tennis shoes.

In less than five minutes after their entrance, the combatants had fallen back a step, after the perfunctory handshake, waiting for Jim Phillips to give the signal.

In that brief instant more than one of the eager circle of spectators noted, with varying feelings, the contrast between the two fellows.

Moran was big and solidly put together, topping his

antagonist by a good six inches. His girth of chest was at least that much greater, and the muscles of chest, arms, and back were almost too well-developed. He made Blake look, as one chap whispered to his neighbor, "like thirty cents," and there was scarcely a doubt among at least half of the onlookers as to who was going to prove the best man.

Phillips, however, and one or two others who were better judges of the human animal, were not so sure. They noted the rippling flexibility of the smaller chap's muscles, the lithe pose, betokening great activity, the unconscious ease with which he fell into a correct position. His face was calm and undisturbed, a faint smile curving the corners of his shapely mouth, and it presented a marked contrast to the angry, morose look on Moran's visage.

"It's not going to be such a one-sided affair, after all," thought Phillips, with pleasure.

A moment later he gave the signal, and the fight was on.

The scant dozen boys who watched it in breathless excitement will not soon forget the spectacle which followed. It was not exactly a repetition of the old David and Goliath contest, for no one could say that Moran lacked skill and science, but it was something very much akin.

Big and brawny and strong as he was, skillful to a degree which had made him the superior of all but half a dozen boys in the entire school, Moran never stood a chance from the very start.

The whirlwind rushes with which he strove at the

outset to annihilate his opponent, were checked or avoided by Blake's amazing ability and speed. Gritting his teeth, his eyes flashing, the big fellow would renew the attack with a fury which it seemed impossible to continue long, only to fail each time to touch his adversary, as he had failed at first.

Wasting his strength in futile efforts, losing little by little the slight grip he held upon his temper, wild with the humiliation of his helplessness in the hands of this boy he had boasted he would fight to a standstill in a couple of rounds, Moran was presently reduced to a condition of frantic, impotent fury without his opponent having struck a single real blow.

It was the most astonishing exhibition of coolness and finesse, of playing the waiting game, that those who saw it had ever beheld. And when, a little later, Blake commenced to attack, they were treated to a sight such as very few of them had ever seen anywhere.

To those who knew little about boxing, the sight resembled nothing so much as a small, active terrier attacking a steer, or some animal of equal size. Blake could dodge entirely around his slower opponent, while Moran was turning a quarter of the circle, and he utilized to the utmost the advantage his activity gave him.

But, though it might seem as if he were taking a good many extra steps and using up much strength which might better have been husbanded, the reverse was true.

The smaller chap was fighting with his head quite

as much as with his fists. He never lost an opportunity to take advantage of an opening. He never —save when feinting—attempted a blow which did not land home. He utilized his strength with a minimum of waste and a maximum of effect which was positively masterly.

He had started out with a definite plan, from which he did not diverge a hair's breadth. He knew Moran's weakness, and played upon it, deliberately seeking to let the big fellow tire himself out as much by the wildness of his uncontrolled rage as by any physical means.

And when at last he landed the final blow which sent Moran sprawling, unable to arise until after time was counted, his face was quite unmarred, save by a bruise on one cheek where a glancing blow had struck.

At once the spectators, who had long ago lost all control of themselves and had been giving vent to their excitement quite freely, hastened to congratulate the victor. They did it, almost without exception, in a hearty, genuine manner which showed that they appreciated to the full the extraordinary exhibition they had just witnessed.

From that moment John Huntingdon Blake became somebody. That he was pleasant, entertaining, and amusing had already been admitted. That he was able to trace his family history back a few hundred years, few of his companions cared a rap, considering it, in fact, somewhat in the nature of an eccentricity. But when Blake received the title of champion boxer of

Farnham Hall, he was instantly advanced a dozen pegs in the estimation of his fellow students.

He became at once so sought after and in demand that every bit of his tact and finesse was called into play to avoid entanglement with boys of whose antecedents he did not approve.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN UNEXPECTED PROPOSITION.

George Brown had witnessed the encounter with mixed feelings. He could not help acknowledging the undoubted superiority of the fellow he hated over Red Moran; but for all that his sympathies had never failed to be with the chap who had provoked the fight.

At the beginning of the affair, he was on the outskirts of the ring; but swiftly, almost without realizing the fact, he was drawn in with the other spectators by the thrilling excitement of it all; and from that moment he ducked and dodged and circled about with the rest, thinking of nothing but the struggle before him and the necessity of watching every blow.

He realized very soon that there could be but one termination to the bout. He saw, too, what Blake's policy was, and the discovery only fanned the flame of his resentment against the chap from California.

Though he could not but admit that Blake was perfectly fair and square in his methods, it seemed to Brown that he might have gone about his work of beating Moran in a different, more merciful, way.

"It's a dirty trick, making a show of Red," he said passionately to himself. "Why doesn't he end it quickly and get the thing over with? He could do it any time he wanted to, but yet he goes ahead and drags it out as long as he can."

Like a good many other people, Brown did not concede his enemy more justice than he was abso-

lutely forced to. He wanted to think the worst of Blake, and was only too ready to credit him with motives which had probably never entered the fellow's mind. He wanted to believe that Blake had underestimated his ability as a fighter on purpose to lure Moran into an encounter, and, having brought that about, he was deliberately prolonging the fight for the sole and only purpose of humiliating his antagonist.

He did not remember, or did not chose to, that Moran alone was responsible for the entire affair. He did not realize that the red-headed chap was a fellow who would have to be beaten to a frazzle before he would acknowledge that he had been beaten at all.

He did not think of this side, because he did not want to; and, though he would have indignantly denied an accusation of unfairness, he really was unfair and partisan to a degree.

After the fight, he was one of the few who did not congratulate Blake and shake his hand. Congratulations he did not think had been merited; and as for shaking hands, he would not have touched Blake's palm for the world.

So he turned and made his way quietly out of the gymnasium, his face frowning and his spirit chafed and angry at the whole matter.

He told himself that this was merely another instance of Blake's caddish tendencies; and he worked himself into such an irritated frame of mind that his mood was reflected in the letter he presently sat down to write to a friend who had lately moved from Cleveland to California and was at present employed in a bookstore in Pasadena.

The greater part of the epistle was, in fact, filled up with a sarcastic, somewhat exaggerated, description of John Huntingdon Blake, his fads, his friends, and his insufferable behavior. When he read it over, Brown was a little ashamed of its tone and of the amount of space he had devoted to a fellow who could not be very interesting to his friend, though, to be sure, Blake's home did happen to be in that very town.

However, he had been owing the letter for some time, and would have no chance of rewriting it that night, so he let it go, and hastened to wash up for supper.

An hour later, just as he was passing through the hall toward the lounging room, he felt a light touch on his shoulder, and, turning, was surprised to see the chap he disliked so greatly standing beside him, looking as fresh and cool as if he had not so recently indulged in a strenuous encounter with one of the champions of the school.

"Hello, Brown," Blake said, in that easy, self-possessed manner which so grated on the other's sensibilities. "Have you anything special to do for fifteen minutes?"

Puzzled, but very much on his dignity, Brown shook his head.

"No, nothing special," he returned stiffly.

"Suppose we go into the lounging room, then?" Blake smiled. "I want to make you a little proposition."

For a moment Brown hesitated, struggling between

his dislike for the chap and his curiosity to know what could be coming.

Curiosity finally won out, and, with a slight nod and a mumbled acquiescence, he followed the other down the corridor and into a room near the end which had been furnished with comfortable chairs, couches, and the like as a lounging room for the boys to use whenever they had a little spare time, with nothing more important on their minds than a perusal of the latest magazine, or just an idle chat with some of their companions.

As his eyes traveled swiftly over the broad-shouldered, graceful, perfectly tailored back of the youth in front of him, Brown frowned deeply.

What was there about this chap which should make Brown stutter and stammer and flush up in this annoying way the instant he was addressed? He had planned that his intercourse with Blake should be coldly polite, with a touch of dignified disdain to show the fellow of what small importance were his insults. Yet the very first chance he had to put this idea into practice, he was awkward and embarrassed as the veriest country bumpkin.

It was humiliating, and did not in the least tend to make Brown more amiable as he took a chair in one corner of the lounging room and waited for Blake to speak.

The latter seemed to be in some slight doubt as to how to begin, but, after a brief pause, he said slowly:

"I presume you know, Brown, that, under certain conditions, Mr. Merriwell allows a little private tutoring here at school?"

The Cleveland chap shook his head.

"I have heard nothing about it," he returned shortly.

Blake smiled a little at the other's tone, and linked his fingers loosely about his crossed knees.

"It's a fact, nevertheless," he said pleasantly. "Provided the tutoring does not interfere with any of the regular work, I believe it is rather encouraged, since it gives a fellow a chance to make a little extra money on the side. Three hours a week are all that any boy is allowed to spend in either giving or receiving information."

Brown, still mystified, nodded stiffly, but made no remark.

"My proposition is this," Blake continued, apparently quite oblivious to the other's coolness. "I'm simply rotten at math. I don't seem to have the least bit of comprehension of the subject, and if I don't do something mighty sudden I'll not be able to pass my prelim next spring. Now, I've noticed that you're a regular shark at both algebra and geometry, and the idea struck me that, if you would, you'd probably be able to coach me up in them so's I'd get the hang better. What do you say to it? Provided, of course, that you could spare the time."

The color flamed into Brown's face, and his heavy brows contracted in a scowl. Here was a fresh insult. Not content with showing him plainly that he considered himself made of better clay than a workingman's son, Blake was throwing his poverty into his face by suggesting that he become a tutor. It was intolerable, and, without further hesitation,

Brown declined the proposition with an emphatic, unqualified abruptness.

"I couldn't think of it," he said, almost snappishly.

Blake looked slightly surprised.

"It would only be three hours a week, and you'd help me out a lot," he protested, purposely ignoring the help which his money would be to a fellow as palpably poor as the one before him.

Brown arose, his face still frowning.

"I couldn't think of it," he repeated, in a tone of finality.

Blake shrugged his shoulders resignedly.

"Of course, if you take that stand, there's nothing more to be said," he murmured. "I'm sorry. I thought we'd hit it off rather well together, if you could put up with my stupidity."

Brown would have given anything for a sarcastic retort which would convey the dislike and contempt he felt for his companion, and at the same time be properly dignified. None occurred to him, however. It would doubtless leap into his mind, matured, biting, and very much to the point, about the time he was dozing off that night. That was the way such things usually happened with him.

Just now he flushed a little and bit his lip as he shook his head again and turned away.

He had not taken three steps across the floor when he stopped abruptly at the thought which had come into his mind. For an instant he had forgotten his position here. He was very far from being free and independent. He was indebted to that unknown friend of his to a degree which a lifetime of effort

could not repay. Was it not his duty to take every opportunity of helping himself? Had he the right to decline anything that would bring in a few dollars —money which would be of infinite service to those at home, who still, in spite of their new-found prosperity, made many sacrifices on his account? Was he not wrong in letting his pride prevent his becoming an undoubted material help to them?

His face flushed and his hands clenched and unclenched themselves as he fought it out in those brief moments, standing undecided, with the eyes of John Huntingdon Blake regarding him in curious speculation.

At last his common sense conquered, and, with an effort, he turned and walked slowly back to the sitting youth.

"I've—changed my mind," he stammered. "If you —want me to, I'll take your offer."

Blake smiled pleasantly.

"I'm awfully glad," he said frankly. "I don't know who I should go to if you threw me down. Will—er —two dollars an hour be satisfactory?"

Brown restrained his emotion with difficulty.

"Perfectly," he said curtly, his eyes fixed on the floor and his cheeks still bright. "When do you want to start in?"

"May as well begin to-morrow," Blake returned. "Suppose you come around to my room right after dinner. Then we'll get it over with before there's anything doing on the field. Is that agreeable?"

Brown nodded.

"Yes, and—thank you," he said grudgingly, as he turned away.

If there was in John Huntingdon Blake's mind the most remote idea that, by thus giving Brown some paying work, he would, in a measure, atone for the thoughtless words which he had uttered a couple of days before, and which he had since regretted not a little, he was vastly mistaken.

The shabbily dressed lad left the room, his dislike increased to positive hatred by what he considered a fresh insult.

He would accept the work Blake had to give, but he made instant mental decision that their relationship should be strictly a business one. He might, indeed, receive money from the snobbish youth, but it would be money well earned. He would give good value, and it need not effect his private opinion in the slightest.

One might have supposed John Huntingdon Blake wise enough to realize that the conferring of a benefit is often more productive of hatred and malice than the doing of an injury.

CHAPTER XIX.

ADDING INSULT TO INJURY.

"Oh, yes," said John Huntingdon Blake carelessly, "dad's on the other side. Went over to see the coronation, you know, and now he's visiting friends there. He stayed with Lord Hereford while he was in London, and now I believe he's shooting at Granley Towers, the Duke of Granley's estate, in Norfolk."

"Does he spend much of his time over there?" inquired Victor Rives, evidently considerably impressed.

"Yes, quite a little. He likes the life there, and the people. Of course, he'd never care about living there altogether—he's too good an American for that; but he often says that this country is no place for men of leisure."

"He's never been in business, then?" Rives asked.

"Oh, dear, no!" Blake smiled. "His money came from land—royal grants to the Sir Guy Blake who was governor of Bermuda and who afterward settled here. They increased enormously in value until now dad has more money than he could possibly spend. Of course, he is busy, to a certain extent, looking after his investments and all that, but I don't suppose you'd call that real work."

Rives laughed.

"No, I don't think I should," he agreed. "Cutting coupons may be a little tiring on the fingers, but there are compensations. Well, I must go. Don't forget

to show up on the courts at three, and we'll have a couple of sets."

He departed, and Blake returned to his desk, where he had been writing a note on the heavy, cream-tinted paper bearing the Blake crest which filled the massive silver rack in such profusion.

From where he sat at another table, correcting some problems in geometry, George Brown glanced over at him and frowned. He had been on his job for some little time, and this was the sort of thing which went on constantly. Fellows were eternally dropping in for a minute to make appointments, borrow something, or just to laugh and chat with the popular Blake, and the shabbily dressed lad had come to hate it intensely.

It was not so much the interruption to their work which got on his nerves, as the fact of Blake's popularity being forced upon him so constantly. It was in such striking contrast to his own lot, for though Brown had made a number of friends, he was not the sort who attracts people to him by the power of personal magnetism, and he was by no means generally popular.

Consequently, he could not help envying the fellow who succeeded, apparently without effort, where he had failed; and each time he came for that hour of tutoring, he found the effort harder, the hour longer, and himself growing more and more bitter against the fate which had given this chap not only money and birth, but a personality which attracted friends as honey does bees.

The very atmosphere of the room irritated him

with its air of quiet, expensive simplicity. Everything in it suggested opulence, from the rows and rows of books, which Blake scarcely ever opened, to the heavy, crested silver desk appointments.

Brown came presently to hate the very sight of the amiable countenance of Admiral Blake, and wished more than once that he might wipe that slightly simpering smile from the face of Lady Constance, daughter of the Earl of Talbot. One and all, these painted likenessess of dead-and-gone Blakes seemed to be constantly regarding him with that same maddeningly gracious condescension that was a marked feature of their descendant's attitude toward those who were beneath him in birth and breeding.

Another extremely trying thing was the manner in which John Huntingdon Blake had come to chat occasionally after the hour of mathematics was over. His manner was pleasant enough, but there was a subtle something in it which was quite lacking when he laughed and joked with any of his real friends. There was none of that touch of easy intimacy; and, though, had he been asked, Brown would have disclaimed any desire to be on good terms with his employer, he resented very much being treated as one on a different plane.

It was infinitely more galling than a business relation, pure and simple, and Brown felt that if it continued very much longer, things would come to a head, and he would be forced to give up the work which, hate it though he did, he had come to look upon with thankfulness as a means for helping his people.

"You've got all these right but one," he said pres-

ently, as he gathered the sheets of paper together and arose from the table.

Blake glanced up, smiling.

"That's good," he said pleasantly. "I'm certainly coming on. At first I was lucky if they weren't all wrong but one. You're a jewel of a tutor, Brown. Just a second, and I'll finish this letter, and be with you."

Brown turned away, with a frown, and glanced out of the window. There it was again, that everlasting rubbing in the fact that he was a tutor. Not that he was ashamed of it in the least, but he hated the manner in which Blake seemed to be constantly reminding him that he was not like the other fellows who came in.

"What's he think, anyhow?" he said angrily, under his breath. "Is he afraid I'll take advantage of being here this way to try and worm my way into his friendship? I wouldn't do it if I could. I don't want to be his friend. I hate him!"

He chafed and fussed, while Blake finished his letter and directed the envelope. And when he started to explain the problem which had gone wrong, his manner was short and distant to a degree.

Perhaps John Huntingdon Blake had grown just a little weary of this stand-offish attitude when he had done his best to be pleasant. Perhaps his mind was on the proposed tennis match with Rives, rather than the matter at hand.

At all events, whatever the reason might have been, he managed to put an extra amount of condescension into his manner, with the result that Brown had all he could do to hold himself in and refrain from an

angry outburst which would probably have ended in a complete severing of their relationship.

He managed to control himself; but, when he had closed the door behind him and was hurrying through the hall, his face became a veritable thundercloud.

"He's the limit!" he muttered angrily. "By Jove! I'd give anything if I could only get even with him somehow."

CHAPTER XX.

THE TURN OF FORTUNE'S WHEEL.

George Brown was not especially keen about athletics. He had never had time nor opportunity for them; and, consequently, he knew little about them from a player's point of view. He had developed, however, a liking for watching the football practice, and he had planned to spend this afternoon in that way on the field.

Going to his room, he flung down the hated book of geometry, which was the outward and visible sign of servitude, picked up cap and sweater, and hastened downstairs. On his way out, he passed the small room where the mail was sorted and delivered, and stepped in to see if there might be a letter from home.

There was a letter, but it happened to be postmarked Pasadena, California, instead of Cleveland.

"From Jim," he commented, as he slit open the envelope and took out the rather bulky inclosure. "Must be in answer to the one I wrote him last week."

There were several closely written pages, and Brown spread them out, with no little curiosity as to what his friend could have found to fill so much space. Apparently it was nothing special. The opening was made up of various minor happenings and commonplace bits of news, but about the middle of the second sheet George came to something which made him give an exclamation of surprise, and pause in his slow walk

across the grass, his expression one of the most intense interest, tempered with pleasure.

"I laughed to myself," ran the epistle, "at what you said about Jack Blake and the lugs he is putting on at Farnham Hall. For a minute I could hardly believe he could possibly be the fellow who lives here, but when I made a few inquiries I saw there couldn't be the slightest doubt.

"He always was smart, but I never would have believed that he could fool the whole bunch of you the way he seems to have done. If you could see his father, old Jim Blake, you'd understand, George, how funny all that guff about family and ancestors and the like really is. The old man is quite a character about here. He started out years ago, I believe, as a ragpicker, and, later, went around the country peddling tinware. Somehow or other, he managed to save enough to buy some land, which nobody thought was worth anything, but later oil was discovered on it in such quantities that he sold out for over a million.

"That's how he got his start. Being a shrewd old codger, he's manipulated that million until it's supposed now to be about ten. There's no fake about that part of it. They've got the coin, all right—barrels of it. But when it comes to family, there's nothing doing. Heaven knows where Jack picked up those portraits of his ancestors, but, take it from me, they're fakes. He's been abroad a lot, and very likely he bought them over there to palm off on that crowd of easy marks you train with.

"I don't believe he knows who his own grandfather was, let alone tracing the line back a few hundred years. The old man is a good sort, to be sure, but there isn't a frill on him that you can see with the naked eye. He chases around town in a big French car, that he drives in his shirt sleeves, with suspenders

showing, and no collar. They've got a big house outside of town which is a corker, but they say old Blake would a lot rather spend his time in a two-room affair he built away out in the country than in all that grandeur.

"The whole trouble is, he can't get used to refined life. I guess his money came too late, and he can't change the habits of his youth.

"Of course, the son is different. He stays here very little, and they say the reason for that is because he's ashamed of the way his father goes on. I've seen Jack several times, and you'd certainly never think he belonged to the old man. He's the swellest dresser in Pasadena, all right, and I reckon the amount he spends on clothes would support two or three families in luxury. He's got swell manners, too, but they're a little too high and mighty to suit me.

"There isn't a doubt that he and your John Huntingdon Blake are the same, though, for I learned that Jack had gone to this same school at Bloomfield for a year before entering college. I suppose he picked up the 'Huntingdon' the same place he got his ancestors. It's a heap sight more tony than plain John Blake, isn't it?

"Do write and let me know what happens when his little bubble bursts, for I'm very curious to know. I don't suppose he had any idea that it would be found out. Very likely he discovered that there was no one from around Pasadena at the school before he decided to go there. Ever yours, JAMES BOWERS."

As he finished the letter, Brown's face was a picture. Amazement and intense, almost vindictive, satisfaction struggled for supremacy, the latter speedily predominating.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed aloud. "What do you think of that?"

It seemed entirely too good to be true. To think that the lofty, superior Blake, whom he had come to hate so intensely, was all a bluff, was something which had never occurred to him. The boy had carried out the deception in every detail so thoroughly that, even now, with the evidence in his hand, Brown could scarcely credit it.

He read the letter carefully again, and his spirits went up at a bound. It must be true. There could be no doubt whatever that the two Blakes were one and the same. Those hateful portraits, then, were not Blake's at all. They had doubtless been picked up in some antique shop, as Bowers had suggested. They were fakes. The coat of arms which was engraved and emblazoned on anything and everything was a fake.

The whole elaborate story of all those ancestors was a lie from beginning to end. Blake had no ancestors, not even a grandfather. His very name did not belong to him.

"Jack Blake is all he really is," Brown said aloud, in a tone of malicious satisfaction. "What a come-down that is from the elegant 'John Huntingdon Blake.' "

What an insufferable cad the fellow was! He was ashamed of his own father—the man who, by his shrewd foresight, had piled up millions for his only son to enjoy. Brown was filled with righteous indignation at the thought. The idea of a fellow practically disowning his father! It was disgusting beyond words.

Suddenly he laughed aloud. It was not a particularly pleasant laugh, for he was thinking of what a

stir the revelation would cause throughout the school. It seemed the irony of fate that he, the fellow Blake had humiliated and insulted, should be the means of bringing the truth to light.

Of course, he meant to spread it about. He told himself that it was his duty, deliberately ignoring the fact that Blake had been the means of his receiving six dollars a week for tutoring. He as deliberately closed his eyes to the effect such a blow would have on the principal actor in the little deception. Or, to be more exact, he did not care how much the chap suffered. He could not suffer more than he deserved.

Suddenly he thrust the letter into his pocket and started swiftly across the field. There was no time to lose. He would do it now.

Ten minutes later he was engaged in earnest conversation with Red Moran, the subject of which seemed to be intensely interesting and satisfactory to them both.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BOMBSHELL.

The astounding news spread like wildfire through the school, and created more comment than anything which had happened in many a day.

The discovery that Blake's whole life was one great deception was greeted with joyful glee by many of the boys who had been more or less snubbed in that quarter.

They laughed scornfully as they discussed the matter in the corridors and rejoiced at the downfall of the fellow who had almost worshiped family, but who, it now developed, had none at all.

They jeered at the portraits they had once regarded with awe, and sneered contemptuously at the "rag-picker's son," forgetting that a few hours before they would have crawled on their knees to secure his friendship.

But they were in the minority. The opinion of the majority—and that included all of those who had been admitted to terms of intimacy by Blake, as well as many others who had admired him from a distance since he had vanquished Red Moran—was that the whole affair was a misfortune.

"It's a darned shame!" Don Shasta said heartily, in talking it over with Phillips. "Of course, I suppose it wasn't right for John to fake up all these ancestors and the rest of it. But, shucks! you might think he

was a criminal from the way some of these fools go on. It makes me sick to hear 'em!"

"I should say it did," Phillips agreed instantly. "There isn't one who wouldn't have been tickled to death to have Blake say a nice word to him before this happened."

Shasta nodded emphatically.

"Sure they would! I'd like to take that rotten little Brown by the neck and choke him. He's to blame for the whole thing, and now I s'pose he's satisfied. He never did like John after that time when he hid behind the lamp and we got to talking without knowing he was there."

"He didn't hide," Phillips objected. "We just didn't see him, that's all. I think, myself, it would have been decenter for him to keep this to himself, though. I'm afraid it'll mean our losing Blake."

"You really think he'll go?"

"I'm afraid so. It would be mighty hard to stay here after this. I'm beastly sorry, too, for he's a corking fellow, after you get to know him."

"That's right," Shasta agreed mournfully. "Of course, he was hipped on this question of family, but nobody paid much attention to that. Every fellow has his weak points, and that was his. Do you think it would do any good for us to tell him we're all with him and don't give a hang about this?"

Phillips considered for a moment, and then shook his head slowly.

"No, I don't believe it would. He's a chap who would decide for himself what he means to do without any help. It's up to us, though, to behave ex-

actly as we always have, and that ought to show him how little we care, without any words. We don't want to be too nice, or he'll think we're sorry for him. Just act as if nothing had happened, and I think he'll understand."

They carried out that program. But, from Blake's manner, it was quite impossible to get any idea of what went on beneath the surface. His manner was absolutely unchanged. Perhaps he was a shade more serious than usual, but not much. He laughed and joked as he had always done, and continued to regard the boys he did not care for with exactly the same manner of tolerant condescension he had always shown toward them.

One thing only was noticeable: He never, by a single word, spoke of family or ancestors. The portraits and photographs stayed in their places, the fake crest was flaunted as of yore, but Blake never mentioned them.

The boys voted him a thorough sport, and hoped the matter would die away. Unfortunately, it did not. Not content with what he had done, George Brown seemed to delight in continuing his work by constantly bringing up the subject.

At the end of two days, boys, hanging around Frank Merriwell's office, saw Blake disappear inside. He was there for a long time—nearly an hour, in fact, and when he emerged he hastened away at once without giving any one a chance to speak to him.

After that all sorts of rumors were rife. Some said that Merriwell had summoned him to dismiss him from Farnham Hall. Others contended that he was

going of his own accord. There were a few who hoped that he would not go at all, but were afraid that he might be forced out by the persistent enmity of Brown, Moran, and one or two others.

It was on that very afternoon that George Brown received a sudden summons to Merry's office, which he obeyed with outward calm, but with considerable inward curiosity. He was not conscious of having broken any of the rules; and as for his part in the late excitement, he told himself that what he had done could never be criticized.

To his astonishment, the first person he set eyes on after entering the office was his old friend, Doctor Angus Macdonald, of Cleveland.

"Why, doctor!" he exclaimed, hastening forward with outstretched hand. "This is great! I had no idea you expected to run down here. It's fine to see you."

Doctor Macdonald nodded to him coolly, but made no attempt to rise. His face was slightly flushed and his eyes indignant. He quite ignored the hand Brown held out.

"I sometimes come down to see my friend, Mr. Merriwell," he said shortly, and then went on in a tone of the most intense displeasure: "Well, I hope you're satisfied with what you've done?"

Brown gasped. He had been hurt and bewildered at the coldness of the usually friendly doctor, but this attack fairly took away his breath.

"Why, wh—what do you mean?" he stammered.

"You ought to know very well what I mean," retorted the older man severely. "I suppose you think

it a neat trick deliberately to lay for a boy who has never done you any harm, and expose him to the scorn and ridicule of all his schoolmates."

Brown's face crimsoned, and he drew himself up stiffly.

"I suppose you refer to Blake," he answered. "It seems to me that he is to blame for what happened, not I."

"Then you suppose wrong," the doctor retorted vigorously. "You knew nothing whatever about the facts of the case beyond what your precious Pasadena friend retailed, and yet you are only too ready to accept them as gospel and put upon them the worst construction possible."

"But when a fellow is ashamed of his own father——" began Brown.

"What's that got to do with it?" interrupted Doctor Macdonald angrily. "What business is it of yours if he was? It's a lie, of course. They're devoted to each other, but they each live the way they prefer, and so people gossip. I have never approved of this ancestor deception, but it's nothing like as bad as the quality of ingratitude."

The flush deepened on Brown's face.

"I certainly gave full value for money received," he protested, thinking of the lessons tutoring. "It was a business relation, and nothing else."

The doctor sprang to his feet and took a step forward.

"Oh, was it?" he demanded. "Young man, do you know who John Blake is?"

Brown gazed at him in bewilderment. For a mo-

ment he wondered whether the doctor had taken leave of his senses. He tried to think of something to say, and then was spared the trouble when the impulsive doctor went on swiftly:

"But for him you'd be in that canning factory this very minute, and your father would be Heaven knows where. A nice spirit you show, I must say, to do your best to hurt the boy who has done more for you and your family than any one else in the world!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE IRONY OF FATE.

For a moment Brown stared stupidly at the speaker, as if unable to comprehend his meaning.

"I don't—understand," he said, at last, in a queer voice.

Doctor Macdonald sniffed impatiently.

"I spoke plainly enough," he retorted. "The boy who paid your father's doctor's bills and got him a good job a few weeks ago is none other than John Blake."

Brown stood as if turned to stone. Every drop of blood drained swiftly from his face, leaving it a ghastly white; and in the eyes which were riveted on the older man was a look of such utter, dreadful horror that Macdonald, angry as he was, felt a quick impulse of regret at the tone he had taken.

He had been too wrought up over the whole affair, however, to relent easily, so he made no comment, even deriving a slight satisfaction from the very evident misery mirrored on Brown's expressive face.

For a long time the boy stood there without moving a muscle. Then he reached out blindly and caught hold of the desk to steady himself. A moment later, he turned slowly and looked questioningly at Frank Merriwell, who had hitherto taken no part in the conversation, but who had paid close attention to everything that went on.

"Yes, it's quite true, George," the latter said quietly. "Of course you didn't know it, for, as I understand from Doctor Macdonald, young Blake did not wish his name mentioned. Still, I think you might have considered what the effects were going to be before you spread this story about the school. Don't think for an instant that I am condoning Blake's deception. That isn't what I mean at all. I simply want you to ask yourself if you are showing the right spirit in being so eager to bring about the humiliation of a boy who has always behaved toward you in a straight, decent manner."

Brown's lips twitched. His drawn, white face showed the utter misery which filled his soul.

"No," he said, in a low, uncertain tone, "I'm the greatest cur alive. If I had only known! Oh, Mr. Merriwell, you can't think how awful it is! Why, he—he's——"

With a sudden irrepressible choke, he turned his back, and for a moment or two there was silence in the room.

At length, when Brown had recovered his control, Frank set to work and, by skillful questioning, sought to get at the motive which had governed the boy's conduct. He knew there must have been a powerful one of some sort. Boys, as a rule, do not do what he had done out of mere caprice and thoughtlessness. Generally they can be trusted to show an even finer sense of the fitness of things than their elders, and their code of honor, while it may seem peculiar in some respects, is, as a whole, a splendid one.

Little by little the whole story came out, and, as it

was revealed in broken, fragmentary answers, Merry saw that there was no need to show Brown where he had gone wrong. In that single moment of gasping surprise, it almost seemed as if he had learned more about himself than he had ever known before.

"It wasn't his being ashamed of his father that made me do it all, sir," he finished contritely. "It wasn't even the way he treated me, or rather the way I made myself believe he had treated me. I was just envious. He had everything that I hadn't, and never would have. He was so much pleasanter and more popular than I, so much better in every way, that I was jealous of all these things and disliked him. And all the time it was he who had done everything for me. I feel as if I ought to go on my knees to him and tell him how sorry I am."

A shadowy smile flitted across Merriwell's face.

"I don't imagine he would like that in the least," he said quietly.

Brown sighed deeply and disconsolately.

"No," he agreed, "I suppose it wouldn't do, but I wish there was some way of showing him that I know what a cur I've been."

"The simplest way is usually the best," Frank suggested. "If it will be any consolation to you, I may say that the experience will do neither of you any permanent harm. It has opened Blake's eyes to the folly of which he has been guilty, and, if he can live down the incident right here in the school, he will have proved his force of character. As for yourself —well, I fancy you're wiser than you were an hour ago."

Kindly as the words were, they did not console the boy to any great extent.

As he left the office, a little later, and walked slowly through the hall, he had never been so utterly miserable in his life.

He had often dreamed of the time when he might meet his benefactor face to face. In those dreams he had always pictured himself as doing some slight favor for the unknown which might, in a measure, repay a little of the debt he owed.

The truth was so different—so horribly different. Instead of repaying the debt, he had made it vastly greater. From the very beginning of their acquaintance, he had worked against the fellow who had done so much for him. Instead of worshiping him and trying to please him, he had hated him with all the strength he had, and had ended by bringing down upon his head the ridicule of the whole school.

He was beneath contempt and not fit to associate with decent people. It would have been better far had he remained in the canning factory and never been given this chance for working evil.

It was with such bitter thoughts as these—exaggerated by the surprise and shock of everything which had happened—that he made his way slowly and irresolutely to the south corridor, and paused before the door of Blake's room.

He hated desperately to go in, not because he did not wish to humble himself, but because he felt that Blake could never forgive him. It must be done, however. Otherwise he would never have a moment's peace. And so he lifted his hand and knocked.

"Come in!" called the familiar voice.

Brown obeyed and stood hesitating on the threshold. The room was in almost as great a disorder as it had been that first day. Crates and boxes were strewn about; some of the pictures were on the floor, while only one or two remained hanging on the walls.

Blake himself stood in the midst, his sleeves rolled up and a hammer in one hand. As he recognized his caller, he straightened up with a slight shadow on his face.

For a moment neither of them spoke. Brown had a queer choking sensation in his throat and his lips were dry. He moistened them several times and swallowed hard before he could utter a word.

"I've—just found out," he stammered, at last. "I —I never knew before, Blake. I wish I could tell you how—how beastly sorry I am for—everything. I'd rather have cut off my right hand than have done what I did."

Blake shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"Oh, that's all right," he returned. "It's all over and done with, so what's the use of our worrying about it?"

Brown choked. This truly was the gentleman of the finer instinct.

"But I can't help worrying," he protested. "After what you did for me, I'm a regular cur."

"You didn't know then," Blake commented. "I dare say you had excuse enough. I fancy my manner rubbed you the wrong way a good bit."

"It wasn't your manner," retorted Brown. "I thought so, but it wasn't that at all. I was just envious

and jealous because you had everything which I didn't have. You see, you have no idea how dirty mean I was."

Blake smiled faintly.

"Oh, well, let's drop it. Let's shake hands and call it quits."

He held out his hand, and Brown gripped it tightly. As he did so, his eyes fell from his companion's face to the boxes scattered about the room, and a fresh pang of alarm shot through him.

"You're not—going to leave, are you?" he asked swiftly.

Blake shook his head.

"No," he said shortly.

Brown gave a sigh of relief.

"These boxes—I thought——" he stammered.

"I'm just packing up a few things to send away," his companion explained shortly.

Then, and only then, did Brown realize that it was the "ancestors" which were being packed. And his face flamed scarlet. Not for the world would he have intentionally referred to something which would be extremely distasteful to the fellow he had wronged so greatly.

Blake saw his embarrassment and quickly divined the cause.

"I did mean to cut it all and get out," he volunteered, balancing the hammer on his palm. "But I had a talk with Mr. Merriwell this morning which made me change my mind. He showed me that the only thing to do was to stick it out here and live down my —foolishness. That's what I'm going to do."

The hammer slipped from his hand and crashed to the floor. He bent to pick it up, and when he raised his head his face was rather red.

"Seeing as you're here, Brown," he went on carelessly, "perhaps you'll give me a hand crating these things. It's a bigger job than I thought."

Ancestors and all that sort of thing were soon forgotten by Merriwell's lads, however, by the introduction of a new sport at the school in the form of aviation. A young aviator came to the front in a most unexpected way, and for a time all the talk of the whole school was about bird men and means of flying. It began with the discord between Burton and Rudd.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BEGINNING OF IT.

The discord between Otis Burton and Morgan Rudd dated from the very day of their entrance to Farnham Hall at the beginning of the spring term.

Just what caused it would be hard to determine. Perhaps the fact of their arriving on the same train had something to do with it. The journey was long and somewhat tedious; and Burton was the kind of fellow who is never so happy as when displaying the brilliancy of his wit and the biting character of his repartee, at the expense of some one else.

Under the circumstances it was not unnatural that he should make Morgan Rudd the butt of his ridicule; for, of the five fellows who journeyed from New York to Bloomfield together, Rudd was by far the most unusual in manner and appearance.

He was, to begin with, rather lank and loose-jointed, with a shambling sort of gait, and a habit of bumping awkwardly into things. His hair was decidedly too long, obscuring his collar in the back and protruding in an untidy mass under his hat brim, so as almost to cover the straight, black brows which nearly met over the bridge of his nose, and gave an odd, sinister expression to his thin, narrow face.

His eyes were gray, and, except at rare intervals, they were almost expressionless. It was not the vacancy of stupidity, but rather the look of a person

whose mind is absorbed to an extraordinary degree by some secret thought. That impression was, in fact, borne out by everything about him; his prolonged fits of absent-mindedness, the quick start he gave whenever he was spoken to, the very way in which he slumped down in his seat on the train and sat staring out of the window for hours at a time without changing his position a particle.

Such a character was almost sure to arouse Otis Burton's ridicule, and he did not fail to take advantage of this opportunity for relieving the tedium of the journey, and at the same time establishing a reputation for a wit.

The other three boys, all younger than either Burton or Rudd, were thus pleasantly entertained, during the greater part of the ride, by the sparkling witticisims directed by Burton at the lone occupant of the opposite seat.

He criticized the boy's clothes, which, though of good cut and quality, had been carelessly put on and showed signs of untidiness. He drew attention to the frowsy hair in terms of such cutting banter that his auditors were convulsed. He applied to the lanky youth such names as "Fido," "Beanpole," "Spider," "Legs," and others of a like nature, until the three unsophisticated ones fairly shrieked with mirth and decided that he was the funniest fellow they had ever seen.

All this was very gratifying to Burton, and for a time satisfied that craving for applause which was one of the salient features of his make-up. Presently, however, the entertainment began to pall. In spite of

the fact that his remarks had all been uttered in a perfectly audible voice, the pitch of which had gradually increased, Morgan Rudd paid no more heed to them than if he had been stone-deaf.

At first Burton thought the lanky chap was shamming; but at last he became convinced that there was no fake about it. Rudd was manifestly so absorbed in his own thoughts that he heard not a single one of the remarks which so entranced the other boys.

Burton was provoked and decidedly aggrieved. One might as well waste time and mental effort on a wooden image as on this impassive youth who neither heard nor saw anything which went on.

For a time, Burton redoubled his efforts and increased the opprobrium of his epithets, but to no avail. At last, stung by the cessation of applause from his satellites, who had likewise perceived the situation, and were becoming somewhat bored, he arose, and, with a significant wink at his companions, crossed the aisle and dropped down beside Rudd.

He waited a moment, or two, expectantly; but Rudd did not turn his head Annoyed, Burton began a series of contortions which were supposed to be a clever take-off on the lanky chap's attitude and appearance. He was in the midst of a peculiarly effective grimace when Rudd, suddenly and quite without warning, turned and regarded him with a cool, calm, disconcerting gaze which so surprised the witty youth that he lost, for an instant, the use of his ready tongue.

After a swift scrutiny of Burton's face, the boy with the scraggy hair glanced hastily around the car as if looking for some one.

"Find him?" inquired Burton, with a grin, when the other had turned back.

"Why, no," Rudd answered mildly. "At least, I don't see anybody who looks like one."

Burton frowned.

"One what?" he demanded.

Rudd smiled propitiatingly.

"A keeper," he explained. "You'll excuse me if I'm wrong, but you looked so queer making those funny faces that I thought perhaps you weren't just—a—right in your——"

He hesitated, and Burton heard a suppressed snicker from the boys across the aisle, which brought the color flaming into his face and made his eyes flash angrily. There is a vast difference between being laughed with and laughed at.

"What you need is a nurse to travel round with you, or you'll land in the bughouse yourself," he snapped, making the only retort he could think of at the moment.

Rudd's eyes widened.

"Do you really think so?" he asked seriously. "I don't suppose you'd consider taking the position, would you?"

Burton laughed jeeringly.

"Not on your life!" he retorted. "I'm not looking for that kind of a job."

"Too bad," murmured Rudd, with a side glance at the three small boys on the opposite seat. "You seem to have done so well with the kindergarten that I thought perhaps you might——"

It was not necessary to finish the sentence. Burton

made the mistake of losing his temper, and, after a few scathing but rather silly remarks, to which the lanky chap paid no heed whatever, he returned to his seat in a rage.

From that moment he had it in for Morgan Rudd and set about systematically to jeer and ridicule him.

He did not stop to think that he had brought down on his own head the gentle little retorts which had angered him so. He only remembered that he had been made a fool of before a lot of kids.

He laughed at the boy's clothes and his generally untidy appearance. He made fun of his spindly shanks and generally poor development, which was so apparent in the gymnasium work. He jeered at his inability to play games, and called him "sissy" and other names of a like nature. He tried his best, in fact, to get the other boys down on him, even going so far as to insinuate that he was a coward and did not go in for baseball or any other game because he was afraid of being hurt.

He succeeded passably well in molding the opinion of a good many fellows; for Burton was the sort of chap who throws a tremendous bluff and gets away with it.

He had a pleasant and extremely adaptable manner, being hail fellow well met with his equals, slightly deferential and delicately flattering with those who were important in the school, and graciously condescending to the small fry.

In this manner, coupled with a certain amount of superficial cleverness, he succeeded in creating the impression that Morgan Rudd was more or less of a fool.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE GOAD OF CURIOSITY.

Perhaps Rudd himself was a good deal to blame for the half-tolerant, half-contemptuous manner with which he came at last to be generally regarded.

He was, to say the least, a bit "queer." He made absolutely no effort to become on friendly terms with any of the fellows. Indeed, on more than one occasion, he was short and brusque, repulsing their well-meant attempts to draw him out in a manner which did not encourage further advances.

He did his work only passably well and spent the minimum amount of time possible in the gymnasium.

During the periods of recreation, he had a way of disappearing from sight, sometimes going for long, solitary walks through the woods and surrounding country, but usually seeking his room as soon as possible after dinner and not emerging until supper time.

What he did there no one knew; and for a time his movements were a matter of indifference. At last, however, the curiosity of various boys who had nothing particular to occupy their minds became aroused.

Egged on by Burton, who was always on the alert to find something new in the lanky chap's behavior which would be productive of ridicule, a number of them would steal up to the corridor every now and then and take turns peering through Rudd's keyhole, and listening at the crack in his door.

Their efforts were quite futile and resulted only in increasing their ardor for information. The line of vision through the keyhole was very limited, including at best only the back of a chair and a stretch of blank wall beyond.

More than half the time, not even that much was visible, Rudd having a habit of leaving his closet door open, thus obscuring everything to a tantalizing degree.

The sense of hearing was productive of little more information. Occasionally the sounds of hammering came from the room, varied by scraping and snipping and other puzzling noises which made it appear that Rudd was engaged in making something; though what that something was no one could conjecture.

The greater part of the time, however, the room was silent as the grave. Had they not seen its occupant go into it, they would never have supposed any one to be there.

"It get's me," Burton said irritably, one day, after they had spent an hour in futile endeavor and had then retired discomfited, but with curiosity more keen than ever. "The fool's bughouse, in my opinion."

Ralph Shearman scratched his head in a puzzled manner.

"He don't seem as if he was off his nut," he objected. "I got talking to him the other day, and he's sensible enough when he takes the trouble to be."

"Oh, they all have spells when they seem sane," jeered Burton. "If he isn't nutty, what in thunder makes him shut himself up in his room all the time and do nothing?"

"How do we know he isn't doing anything?" put in

Christy Brown. "We can't see a blessed thing through that keyhole."

"No, nor hear a sound," retorted Burton. "Ever since the hammering and filing stopped last week, he might as well be dead for all the noise he makes. Now if you can give any good reason why a fellow would spend three or four hours every afternoon, and goodness knows how many at night, just locked in his room doing nothing, I'll admit that he's sane, or anything else you please."

"Maybe he's boning," Brown suggested hesitatingly.

Burton laughed scornfully.

"That's likely, isn't it?" he scoffed. "Why, he's the thickest thing you ever saw in the classrooms. Half the time he hasn't looked at a book."

"That's right," admitted Brown. "Well, I give up. But I'd sure like to know what's going on in there. Isn't there any way we can get into the room?"

"He locks the door whenever he goes out," Shearman spoke up. "I've tried it any number of times."

"How about the window?" suggested Brown. "Couldn't we get a ladder and climb up there some evening?"

"How are we going to manage that?" demanded Burton. "All the ladders about the place are locked up in the basement at night."

There was a prolonged pause, which was broken by a sudden exclamation from Brown.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "There's nothing to prevent our getting down from above on the end of a rope. Why, your room's directly above his, Ralph. The thing would be a cinch."

"So it is," Shearman agreed slowly. He did not particularly like the idea of dangling in mid-air.

Burton, however, was instantly enthusiastic.

"By George, Chris!" he exclaimed. "That's a pretty good idea of yours. The three of us could manage it nicely. Two would be plenty to lower the other down and pull him up again after he has seen into the room."

"But who's going to be the one to go down?" Shearman inquired anxiously.

"Why, Brown's the lightest," Burton answered readily. "He'd better do that part."

"Nothing doing," Brown put in hastily. "I don't see why I should do it any more than either of you."

"You're the lightest," Burton explained propitiatingly.

"By about six pounds," retorted Brown. "We compared weights in the gym last week."

"Ralph and I are stronger, though, and could pull you up easy," Burton protested.

Brown doubled his right arm, distending the muscles.

"Are you, though?" he said belligerently. "Feel of that. Hard as iron. I reckon I can pull all you can. No, we'll match for it, or I stay out."

Finding that no argument could move him, the others gave in gracefully and proceeded with great caution to match coins for the undesirable position. When the "honor" fell to Burton he had difficulty in restraining his annoyance. He was no more anxious to make the descent than Brown, but he could not back out very well at this stage of the game, so he submitted to the inevitable as gracefully as possible.

"Oh, well, it doesn't make much difference which I do," he said nonchalantly. "It's a heap less work being let down and pulled up. Let's get started after a rope. We want to pull this off to-night, if we can."

By considerable maneuvering they were able to sneak a coil of stout rope out of the basement tool room, and conveyed it at once to Shearman's room, where it was hidden carefully in the closet.

Having discussed in detail the manner of procedure for that evening, they departed for the football field, very much pleased with themselves, and looking forward with considerable satisfaction to the final solution of the mystery which had bothered them so long.

The moment the stroke of nine terminated the evening study period, they made a bee line for Shearman's room and, having carefully locked the door, began their preparations. The rope was brought out and a loop made at one end large enough for Burton to slip his arms through.

"By gee!" Brown exclaimed suddenly, as he watched his companion trying the effect. "You'll be sore as blazes with that rope chafing. What we want is a couple of small pillows to go under your arms and relieve the strain."

"That's so," agreed Burton, somewhat chagrined that he had not thought of it. "Let's have two small sofa cushions, Ralph."

But it developed that Shearman had nothing of the sort, not yet having equipped his couch. The bed pillows being much too large, and nothing else striking them as a good substitute, Brown was forced to steal forth to his own room for the necessary articles.

He returned safely without having encountered any one on the way. And the preparations proceeded swiftly.

Glancing out of the window, Burton could see that Rudd's room was still brightly lighted, and to his curious ears came the faint sound of filing.

"He's working at it again, whatever it is," Burton announced, in a joyful whisper. "We'd better start right away. Take a couple of turns around the corner of the bed, and then the rope won't slip."

They did so and tested it by pulling hard. Instantly the bed began to move forward, and it was necessary to shove the bureau over to hold it in place before they could proceed.

At last, however, everything was in good shape, and Burton slipped the rope under his arms, adjusted the pillows carefully, and then walked to the window.

"Be sure you let down slow," he cautioned. "Lucky his window isn't right underneath this one, because I'll come down alongside of it, instead of directly in front. When I get so's I can see in, I'll give a hiss and you hold me there. When I want to come up, I'll give two hisses. Remember now, let her go easy. Not more than an inch or so at a time."

The others agreed in low tones, and Burton proceeded to slip carefully over the sill. He hesitated some time before he finally let go his hold on the solid wood.

The ground seemed very far below, and he was suddenly seized with a fear that the rope might not be as strong as it looked. He pictured to himself the parting of the strands, the sudden plunge and horrible

landing on the ground below, crushed and mangled. In that moment he berated himself for ever having attempted such a thing. If there was only some way of getting out of it even now——"

"What's the matter?" demanded a voice impatiently, from the room behind him. "Why don't you start?"

"I'm going to," he returned, in a whisper.

It was too late to back out.

With a shudder, he let go his hold on the sill and began to move slowly downward.

Presently he breathed a sigh of relief. It was not as bad as he had expected. The rope held, with scarcely a creaking; and his downward progress was slow and comparatively steady—a barely perceptible slipping, so careful were the two boys above to do the thing right.

He was much more comfortable, too, than he had expected to be, thanks to the pillows under his arms; and, before long, he quite overcame his fear and began to look forward with pleasure to the discovery which would come very soon.

He had reached a point where his knees were about on a level with the top of the window, when suddenly the lowering motion ceased, and an instant later the taut rope was jarred violently.

Burton's heart leaped into his mouth and he could hardly suppress a cry of fear. What had happened? Was the rope going to part and let him fall?

With wildly thudding heart—for he was decidedly lacking in nerve, for all his bluster—he hung there waiting. Presently the jarring stopped, but an odd, disconcerting noise like scuffling came from the room above, which continued for a moment, then ceased.

Puzzled and not a little frightened, Burton waited a moment or two before twisting himself around and glancing upward. The window above was quite empty, and the room he had just left was silent as a tomb.

"Ralph!" he called, in a stealthy whisper. "Chris! What's the matter?"

No answer. Not a sound of any sort came from the window, and a cold chill began to run up and down Burton's spine.

He could not understand what had happened. They must be there. They would never go away and leave him dangling helpless in mid-air.

He called again, this time a little louder, but he did not dare raise his voice for fear of bringing Rudd to his window and betraying everything.

Still there was no answer; and a horrid fear began to pervade the mind of Otis Burton that he had been deserted.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FELLOW WHO DANGLED.

At first the helpless youth decided that "Peanut" Hall, the young and zealous tutor who was in charge of the corridor above, had, in some manner, discovered what was going on.

Instantly, however, he rejected the idea as impossible. Had that been the case, the man would have been only too eager to see who was on the end of the rope, that he might punish this infraction of discipline.

The next supposition was that Brown and Shearman were playing a joke on him. The thought filled him with rage, which increased with the growing conviction that he was in no actual danger of being hurled to the ground by the parting of the rope.

The rope, in fact, seemed only too strong. It bound him tightly under the arms and, though he presently conceived the idea of climbing back on it, hand over hand, he soon found that he could not even reach around and grasp it.

Furious by this time, he began to call again in suppressed tones, threatening the two fellows with all sorts of dire penalties if they did not instantly pull him up, and upbraiding them in terms which were distinctly more forcible than polite.

The effect was startling. Suddenly, from various windows near by, a chorus of mocking remarks floated out into the night.

"Listen to the mocking bird!"

"Oh, naughty, naughty!"

"Ain't he perfectly awful!"

"He's a real ba-ad man!"

"Where'd he learn all those lovely words?"

"Who is he, anyhow?"

"Yes! who is he?"

"What's he doing there?"

"Can't you see, you chumps? He's practicing for the rope-climbing contest."

"Then why don't he climb?"

"Maybe he's resting."

"Oh, no! He doesn't have to rest. Just look at those arms. Why, he's got Sandow skinned a mile."

"Maybe he'll give us an exhibition. Won't you climb for the lady, Willy? Be nice and show us how you do it?"

"Too bad! I'm afraid he's shy."

Fairly foaming at the mouth with fury, Burton writhed and twisted and endeavored to get a hold on the rope, quite forgetting his former fear of falling. Unfortunately, the loop was a rather large one, and the knot was at his back, some distance above his head, so that his efforts were quite futile.

The jeering voices continued to sound from all sides; but, though he was aching to retort, he did not dare say a word. Apparently they had not yet recognized him, and, if he could only escape from his unfortunate predicament, there was a bare chance that they might never know who he was.

What had happened he could only guess. In some manner, the boys had become wise to what he was at-

tempting, and either they had induced Shearman and Brown to join them, or else they had seized the two fellows and tied them up so that they could not interfere.

Remembering the scuffling noise, he inclined to the latter supposition. But, whichever was the truth, he was in a most humiliating position.

A prisoner here until his tormentors chose to release him, he had not the slightest hope that they would fail to discover his identity. They would keep him dangling at their own sweet pleasure, taunting him the while with the sarcastic jibes and jeers which were even now driving him almost frantic; and then, when they were quite tired of their entertainment, they would draw him up to Shearman's room, to find out just who it was that had afforded them so much amusement.

Burton shivered at the thought. He would be the laughingstock of the entire school, for such a chance as this of making fun does not often occur. He, who had enjoyed ridiculing others so much, would now suffer in his turn; and, as he realized what was in store for him, he felt that he would give anything he possessed if he could only escape it.

He even seriously considered cutting the rope and taking his chances in a drop to the ground. It was not so very far, and almost anything would be better than being found out. But when he glanced downward into the shadowy darkness below he did not dare risk it.

So he hung there, struggling silently, now and then, to grip that knot which the tips of his fingers could barely touch, maddened by the mocking voices from all about, with cold chills of apprehension coursing up and

down his spine, until, of a sudden, there came that jarring vibration on the rope again.

His heart leaped into his throat as he glanced swiftly upward. They were going to pull him up; in a moment more everything would be discovered. As he looked, two heads were thrust cautiously over the sill, and an instant later a faint whisper came down to him.

"Otis!"

It was Shearman's voice, and a thrill of hope shot through Burton. Had they possibly managed to escape? Was there yet a chance for him to get away unrecognized?

He hesitated a moment and then gave two sharp hisses. He did not notice that the light in Rudd's room had gone out an instant before.

To his joy, the response was instant. He began to ascend at a speed which was far more rapid than his descent had been. Evidently whoever was at the other end of the rope realized the necessity for haste.

As he reached the window ledge, he gripped it with both hands, and in another moment was in the room.

"We couldn't help——" began Brown excitedly.

Burton cut him short. Not an instant must be lost in getting out of the room and down to his own, on the next floor.

"They don't know who I am," he gasped. "If either of you tell, I'll kill you."

Without another word, he crossed the room on the run, jerked open the door and darted into the hall. In another second he reached the top of the narrow stairway which led to his own corridor and disappeared into the darkness.

He was not an instant too soon. Scarcely had he vanished when several doors were hastily opened and shadowy forms made a concerted but noiseless rush to the scene of the little drama. To their disappointment and chagrin, they found only the two boys whom they had trussed up, but who had managed, somehow, to untie their bonds.

"Where is he?" demanded Jack Ranleigh, who was substitute quarter back, but who loved a joke even better than football.

"Gone," returned Shearman laconically.

On the way to the window, some one stumbled over the rope and announced that the fellow had told the truth. When this fact had been made certain, Ranleigh turned to the two boys who were regarding the intruders with malicious satisfaction.

"Who was it, Chris?" he asked ingratiatingly. "Come on and tell us."

"Go to grass!" returned Brown. "Find out yourself, if you're so keen to know."

And that was the last word from both of them. Neither threats nor persuasion could induce them to reveal the name of the fellow who had dangled for a good half hour at the end of that rope; and the older fellows were finally forced to give it up and return to their rooms with the uncomfortable conviction that they had bungled, and that the joke was not altogether on the unknown.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE LAUGHINGSTOCK OF THE SCHOOL.

Next morning the story spread quickly over the entire school, and the question in every boy's mouth was the identity of the fellow who had been the butt of the joke.

Burton was, of course, suspected, on account of intimacy with Shearman and Brown; but there were a dozen other boys on equally friendly terms with the two, so that the question was very far from being answered.

Indeed, Burton threw such a successful bluff as to having been one of those who sang out from his window, and professed so keen a curiosity as to who the unknown might be, that suspicion was more or less diverted.

Nevertheless, he was thankful when the day had passed without any further evidence coming to light; and, by the following morning, he came to the pleasing conclusion that he was fairly safe.

With this reassuring thought came a return of the desire to carry out the scheme which had resulted so disastrously, and discover what Morgan Rudd was doing in his room. Through some intricate process of reasoning, Burton laid the blame of his humiliation at Rudd's door, and this increased the grudge he held against the fellow, making him the more anxious to obtain additional ammunition for further assaults.

Access to Rudd's room through the window being now out of the question, the door was the only ingress left. To be sure, this was always kept locked, whether the taciturn chap was in his room or not, but the matter of a key ought not to be insurmountable. The style was an ordinary one, and, though all the locks throughout the school were different, blank keys of the right size were to be had at the village locksmiths; or it might even be possible to secure one of the master keys.

The last method was rejected as being too risky. But early that afternoon, Christy Brown hastened to the village and returned as speedily as he could with a blank key.

They had expected to wait till the next morning for the operation; but when Rudd was seen leaving the building and striking off toward the woods, it was decided to go ahead at once. The key was carefully coated with wax from a candle and, when placed in the lock and turned firmly, a fair impression appeared, which was at once attacked with a file.

The process took some time. They filed in Burton's room and every now and then had to sneak out to see if it fitted. At last, to their joy, it turned stiffly, and they hastened to slip into the room and close the door behind them.

The eager curiosity with which they looked about can be imagined. The place was almost as bare as a barn. Not only had no attempt at "fixing up" been made, but it was one of the untidiest rooms any of the boys had ever seen. Clothes lay about here and there without order. Shoes and soiled linen were on the

floor or banked against the closet door as if they had been thrown there and then forgotten.

In amazing contrast to the general disorder was the surpassing neatness of the table, which had been drawn over to the one side of the window and was covered with various tools, little stacks of well-seasoned wood, pieces of linen, and a number of other things, the use of which the boys could not even guess.

"Gee! This is a great outfit," exclaimed Brown, picking up a small file which was as delicate as a jeweler's implement. "But what in time does he use it for?"

"I'm hanged if I know," Burton answered, pawing here and there on the table. "I don't see a darned thing——"

"Look here, fellows—quick!" cried Shearman excitedly.

He had been attracted by something bulky on the bed which was covered with a large sheet of paper. He had not hesitated to remove the paper, for further inspection. As the other two hastened to his side, they both gave exclamations of astonishment.

The thing which rested on the white coverlet, and which had unquestionably been the cause of Rudd's many days and nights of toil, was a small model of an aëroplane, the workmanship of which was so perfect that both Shearman and Brown were moved to comment upon it with considerable enthusiasm.

Burton's lips curled scornfully, however. He could see nothing good emanating from the hands of the boy he so disliked, and he at once proceeded to throw cold water on his friends' involuntary praise.

"Bah!" he sneered. "That shows he's crazy. Think of any sane chap wasting all the time he has on a kid's toy."

"It looks better than that to me," protested Brown, bending over to examine it more closely. "Everything about it's perfect, even the engine. Why, I never saw anything like it in my life."

"You haven't seen much, then," growled Burton ill-temperedly. "They sell things like that at all the toy stores in New York."

"I'll bet they're not like this," put in Shearman. "Why, it looks to me as if the thing could fly."

"For about two yards," sneered Burton. "Come on, and let's get out. We don't want to be pinched here. This proves I was right. The chump's as loony as they make 'em. He's wasted days and days making something he could buy better for a couple of dollars."

Silenced, though not quite convinced, his companions followed him out of the room and downstairs. It was later than they had thought, for the fellows were beginning to come in from the football field, and the main hall below was filled with laughing, joking groups.

Hesitating on the last step, Burton's eyes lit up with a keen, malicious joy as they fell upon the figure of Morgan Rudd just entering the door. Here was a chance which might not soon occur again to give his enemy a dig before the whole crowd, and he hastened forward to meet the boy in the very midst of the mob.

"Hello, Rudd!" he said loudly, and with a decidedly contemptuous inflection. "Been doping out any more flying machines lately?"

The lanky chap gave a slight start, and instantly his expression became watchful.

"I don't think I understand what you're driving at," he returned quietly.

"Ho! ho!" laughed Burton. "Modest, eh? Surely you're not ashamed of the great work."

He turned, grinning, to the near-by fellows, who were glancing curiously in his direction.

"Didn't know we had an inventor in our midst, did you?" he chuckled. "Why, Rudd, here, has invented an aëroplane which is going to revolutionize the science. Before long you'll see him circling all over the place as easy as the rest of us walk. When are you going to start work on the real thing, Rudd?"

The frowsy-haired chap made no reply, but continued to regard his tormentor with a curiously fixed scrutiny which seemed to irritate Burton considerably, and made him drop his bantering tone.

"Are you really fool enough to think you'll do anything with that machine of yours?" the latter demanded scornfully.

"I don't know that it's any of your business what I think," Rudd retorted calmly.

Burton's lips curled.

"Humph!" he grunted. "I'll guarantee you'll never get off the earth in it."

A shadowy smile passed over Rudd's thin face.

"At least I won't dangle in mid-air, and not be able to get down," he commented, with a slightly significant emphasis.

It was as if he had struck Burton a blow across the

cheek. The color flamed into his face, and he clenched his hands tightly. How much did the fellow know? How had he found out? Burton's first impulse was to cut short the conversation instantly, and retreat with what grace he could. But, almost as soon as the thought came into his mind, he realized how impossible it was. Already the fellows around were pricking up their ears and crowding forward. The only way of escape was by brazening it out.

"Ha! ha!" he laughed loudly. "No, you certainly won't. If you ever get up in the air you'll have to be held there by a pole, or something."

Rudd's eyes were still fixed steadily on his. They seemed calm and placid, but in their depths there lurked a glimmer of amusement which made Burton long to strike him down then and there.

"Even that's better than hanging at the end of a rope, isn't it?" he asked quietly.

Burton's face grew redder, and he scowled fiercely.

"What d'you mean by that?" he demanded belligerently. "If you think that I——"

His voice was drowned in the concerted shriek of joy which went up from all around.

"Oh, you dangler!"

"You rope climber!"

"Hi, Bill! Here's the moke that was doing the Romeo stunt the other night on the rope."

"Is that straight?"

"Sure! Take a squint at his face."

"Whatcher blushing so for, Bertie?"

"You bad thing!"

"Those naughty swear words!"

"He ought to have his mouth washed out with soap."

Burton glanced around at the circle of grinning faces in helpless fury. Instantly he realized the utter futility of denial. They would not believe him.

He wanted to lash out at them with bitter, taunting words, but he managed, luckily for himself, to refrain. They would only welcome such an outburst, and return it tenfold.

For a moment or two he stood speechless, his face taking on a purplish tinge. Then he whirled suddenly, and, tearing through the crowd, raced back upstairs, the jeers and laughter ringing in his ears and the mocking words following him as he ran.

When he reached the safety of his own room and turned the key, he stood for a moment panting slightly, his whole face working with the fury which possessed him.

Rudd had brought this thing about, and he should suffer. He would be revenged if it took every minute of his time for the remainder of the year. He would make that lanky scarecrow sorry—bitterly sorry—he had ever meddled with what did not concern him.

He did not stop to think that Rudd was only hitting back in a perfectly fair manner. He did not consider that the chap had kept his own counsel for three days, and would doubtless have kept it forever, but for Burton himself. He only knew that he had been made the laughingstock of the entire school, and he swore a solemn oath that he would be amply revenged.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE RUINED MODEL.

Bart Hodge, Merry's chief assistant, dropped into a chair in the office and folded his arms.

"There's something queer about this fellow Rudd, Frank," he announced seriously.

Merriwell raised his eyebrows.

"In what way?" he asked.

"In every way," Hodge returned emphatically. "He's about the most perplexing character I've had to do with in a long while. Have you paid much attention to him?"

Frank's eyes twinkled, but his face was serious. He was used to Bart's manner of looking upon the dark side in sizing up a boy.

"I've noticed that he keeps a good deal by himself," he answered quietly. "I haven't spoken to him about it, because I was hoping he'd get over it of his own accord. It's always better if they can overcome this shyness without any interference."

Hodge frowned.

"It isn't shyness that's troubling him," he said darkly. "It's something worse."

"Worse?" queried Merry. "Just what do you mean, Bart?"

"He's got something on his mind," Hodge said emphatically. "Most of the time he goes around in a walking trance. His lessons are never more than half

prepared, and in the gym he never does a stroke of work more than he actually has to, and does that in a half-hearted manner. Since he's been here, he hasn't even gone near the athletic field, let alone evinced the faintest desire to play anything. And you know that even the worst muffs toss a ball now and then, and always show up for the games, if they do nothing else. Depend upon it, Frank, he's brooding over something."

Merriwell straightened up in his chair, now thoroughly interested. It was just possible that there might be something in Bart's point of view. He himself had noticed some of these pecliarities in Morgan Rudd, but he had so far been too busy to make a careful study of this particular boy.

"Have you any notion of what's on his mind?" he asked.

"Nothing exactly definite," Hodge answered. "But from the way he behaves, I should think he might be worrying over something he's done. It might even be a theft, or something like that. What sort of a character did his people give him? Suppose you look up the correspondence and see."

There was no need for Frank to look up the letters, however. That marvelous memory of his seemed to retain the facts concerning every boy in the school.

"I don't recall any question of his honesty," he returned slowly. "His father said he was lazy and shiftless, and couldn't be made to study or take any exercise. He spent a great deal of time shut up in his room, or else taking solitary walks, from which he was quite as apt to return long after supper was

over. He seemed to have no idea of time, and no sense of responsibility."

"Exactly as he does here," Hodge said triumphantly. "He spends every afternoon in his room, or else off in the woods. He's been late to supper any number of times. Now, what does he do with himself? And what's he got on his mind? That's what I want to know."

"That's something we shall have to find out," Merry said, smiling. "I'm glad you brought this up, Bart. I've been so busy with plans for the new building and a lot of other things, that I've had no time to give to the boys individually. I'll look up Rudd at once and see if I can get at the bottom of the mystery."

It thus happened that the next afternoon, as the lanky, dreamy-eyed fellow emerged from the dormitory directly after dinner, he found the head of the school just passing the door, apparently having come from the gymnasium.

"How are you, Morgan?" Merry said pleasantly. "Going for a tramp?"

"Ye-es, sir," returned Rudd, much embarrassed by the encounter. "I was going down—er—by the lake."

"Good! We may as well walk along together, then. I have to look at one of the shells which was broken yesterday."

Rudd acquiesced because there was nothing else to do. He would much rather have gone his way alone, however. The presence of the older man bothered him, and disturbed his train of thought.

This fact was perfectly apparent to Frank; but he paid no attention to it, chatting with Rudd in an easy,

natural manner about various matters of school interest, and exercising to the utmost his extraordinary faculty of putting a fellow at his ease.

Presently Rudd began to feel more comfortable, and before long he found himself thawing to a degree of which even he was unaware. Merriwell realized it to the full, however, and in that short walk he learned more of the boy's inner nature than one would have supposed possible.

By the time they reached the boathouse where the shells were kept, he had come to the conclusion that Hodge was wrong. Rudd was not brooding over anything disgraceful. He was intensely absorbed in something; but just what that something was remained, for the moment, a question.

Leaving his young companion standing on the edge of the lake, Frank went into the boathouse, looked over the damaged shell, and decided that it could be repaired in the school carpenter shop.

He was gone nearly ten minutes, but when he returned, Rudd stood just where he had left him, his eyes staring out across the lake, where a brisk breeze had stirred the water into choppy little wavelets from which the sun glinted in dazzling, intermittent flashes.

He did not seem to notice Frank's approach, and the latter stood quietly beside him for several moments, wondering amusedly how long the boy would remain in that trancelike condition. Suddenly, without so much as turning his head, the lanky youth spoke:

"A mechanical stability device ought to make flying about as safe as automobiling."

Merry could scarcely believe that he had heard aright.

"What did you say?" he exclaimed, in utter astonishment.

Rudd gave a start, and turned round.

"Oh!" he gasped, the color rising in his face. "I—I forgot. I didn't mean to——"

"Never mind that," Merriwell put in, more quietly. "Just tell me what you meant."

The boy dropped his eyes, and fumbled with the top button of his coat in an embarrassed manner.

"You'll—laugh, of course," he faltered. "I was thinking of aëroplanes. They'd be—a lot safer if a device—was invented to—to keep them from tipping—something which would work automatically."

Frank drew a long breath. Like a flash, he had realized that this was an answer to the thing which had been puzzling him.

"Captain Baldwin once told me," he said quietly, "that when the perfect engine was invented, and an automatic stabilizing device, the conquest of the air would be complete."

Rudd threw back his head and darted a swift, questioning glance at Merriwell.

"You know Captain Baldwin?" he asked excitedly. "Thomas Scott Baldwin?"

Frank nodded.

"He and I are very good friends," he smiled.

"Cracky!" exclaimed the lad. "He's the most wonderful man in the world. I'd give anything to see him some time. They call him the father of aviation, don't they?"

"Yes. He's probably more liked and respected than any other inventor in that line. His name isn't so well known, perhaps, to the general public as some others, for he never indulges in spectacular flights or anything of that sort. He gives all his time to the science of flying, working for the future more than for any present fame. A number of years ago, before he regularly took up the study of aëroplanes, he spent some time here in Bloomfield working on dirigibles for the government."

The boy sighed enviously.

"Gee! I wish I'd been here then," he said. "Have you seen him since, sir?"

"Oh, yes. I've visited him a number of times at Mineola. In fact, we studied together, and all I know about aëroplanes came from him."

"You've studied aëronautics?" Rudd burst out, his eyes sparkling and his whole face alive with interest.

"Yes."

"Driven an aëroplane?"

"Yes, several."

"Monoplane, or biplane?"

Some men would have resented the boy's curt, brusque questions as lacking in the proper respect; but Frank realized the situation perfectly. The boy's mind was so full of the subject which occupied every waking moment, that he had quite forgotten their relative positions. He was talking as one man to another, thinking only of the thing he wanted to know, and without the slightest idea of being impertinent.

"Both," Merry replied, with a slight smile.

"By Jove!" sighed Rudd. "I wish——"

He stopped abruptly, and his jaw dropped. For a moment he stood there looking at Merriwell, with the color flaming into his face. Then his eyes sought the ground.

"I—beg your pardon, sir," he faltered. "I—I forgot who—I was talking to. I—didn't mean to be fresh."

Merriwell laughed lightly.

"I know you didn't, Morgan," he answered. "What is it you wish?"

Encouraged by the man's tone, Rudd glanced up hopefully.

"I've got a model of a monoplane in my room," he explained. "I've been working on it for a long while. I—think I've got something which will keep the machine stable."

To Frank, it seemed a sheer impossibility that a mere boy could have made a discovery of such tremendous moment in the science of flying; but he let no sign of this skepticism appear in his face or his manner.

"If you have done that," he said gravely, "you've succeeded in doing something which has so far baffled every inventor."

"I know it sounds foolish, and all that," Rudd admitted. "But I've gone over it and over it, and I can't see why it won't work. If you would just look it over——"

"Of course I will," Frank put in readily. "Suppose we do it at once. I am most interested."

To tell the truth, he was more than skeptical as to the real value of the invention. He had seen too often the wild enthusiasm and perfect faith of an inventor over something he had discovered, which later turned out to be quite worthless.

But there was no question that he was interested in Rudd himself. During the discussion of aëroplanes, the boy's face had become transformed. The dreamy, almost listless expression gave place to a look of keen intelligence. His whole face lighted up with the enthusiasm which possessed him, and Merriwell felt intuitively that the youth had a brain which was very much out of the common.

The impression was strengthened as they walked briskly back to the school. Rudd was no longer silent and dull, but talked about his beloved hobby in a manner which was more than precocious, and which showed that his grasp of the subject was positively amazing.

Together they entered the room, and, as the lanky chap hastened over to the bed and dropped down on his knees beside it, Merry raised his eyebrows slightly at the dreadful untidiness of the place. The next instant, however, his attention was distracted by a gasp from the boy, followed by a stifled exclamation of horror.

He had drawn a large pasteboard box, without the cover, from under the bed, and was staring into it with a kind of paralyzed despair. As Frank stepped quickly forward and glanced over the lad's shoulder, he drew his breath swiftly.

The box was filled with a mass of broken wood and

torn fabric. Bits of iron and pieces of twisted wire lay all about in confusion. If the thing had ever been a model, it was one no longer. It had been smashed into bits so completely that scarcely a square inch of the original remained to show what it might have been.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MERRIWELL'S OFFER.

For a moment there was utter silence, as the two stood looking at the wreck. Then Rudd rose slowly to his feet and glanced at Merry, his face white and the muscles of his jaw rigid as stone. The pupils of his eyes were scarcely larger than pin heads.

"You see," he said simply, but in a voice which was not quite steady.

Merriwell's brows were contracted.

"You left it all right?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"It's contemptible!" said Merry. "The idea of maliciously destroying a thing which has taken weeks to put together! Have you any suspicion——"

He stopped abruptly and bit his lips. For a moment or two there was silence, and, glancing at the boy out of the corner of his eye, Frank saw in an instant that Rudd had, at least, a notion as to who was responsible for the outrage. Wondering, he waited to see what the lad was going to say.

"If you don't mind, sir," Rudd returned slowly, "I'd rather not tell you. I'm not sure, and so you see it wouldn't do to give you the wrong idea."

Merriwell breathed a sigh of relief.

"I understand perfectly," he said. "I shall do my best, however, to get at the bottom of it. Meanwhile," he glanced down at the box again and shrugged his

shoulders, "I'm afraid this is quite ruined. Perhaps you can explain your device from the drawings you must have made of it."

Rudd's face brightened a bit.

"Oh, yes, sir," he agreed. "I'm afraid it won't be so easy to make it clear, though."

He led the way to his table, and Frank inwardly commented on the contrast between the neatness here and the general disorder of the room. The plans which the boy presently produced were drawn with exquisite skill and attention to detail, which showed that, at the bottom, he had an orderly mind.

For nearly an hour they went over the device together, and, at the end of that time, Frank was somewhat impressed. The thing was on entirely novel lines, and looked distinctly good. Other similar inventions had seemed good, however, so he did not allow himself to be too sanguine or to bank a great deal on the success. There was no question in his mind, though, about giving the ingenious youth every faculty for continuing his work and constructing a new model.

"There's a small room off the pattern shop," he said, after the plans were put away and he had seated himself, "which you may use for this work. We will see that a good lock which can't be picked is placed on the door, to guard against a repetition of this affair. Regarding the model, I should say you had better make it about twice as large, Morgan. It will take longer, but you'll have something which will be a great deal easier to try out. Suppose you make the plane spread six feet, and the other parts in propor-

tion. The matter interests me tremendously, and you may as well be working on something like this as spending your time on more or less useless articles in the manual-training course. There's just one condition I want to make, however,"

He paused an instant, still studying the boy.

"You must not lose yourself in this work, Morgan," he went on. "You must spend only a certain number of hours a day on it, and make a determined effort to put it entirely out of your mind the rest of the time."

Rudd's face fell.

"I don't see how I can, sir," he protested. "My mind's so full of it that I'm always thinking it over."

"Exactly," Frank agreed. "It must stop, however. Otherwise you'll very soon become hipped on the subject. A man's mind isn't meant to be developed in only one direction. It must be broadened and given variety or it becomes abnormal. When you are working over your invention it is right and proper that you should think of nothing else, but when you are away from it you must forget it entirely. Mingle more with the other boys, play baseball——"

"Gracious!" Rudd exclaimed, aghast. "I never played ball in my life."

"Then it's high time you learned," Merry smiled. "I'm afraid that side of your education has been entirely neglected. You simply must give your mind variety. Even Edison, hard as he works over his inventions, never spends all his time on one thing. When he finds himself becoming fagged, he drops one thing and takes up another of a totally different character,

Since you are not interested in any other problems, you must do what is even better, attend to the development of your body, and learn to like the games and sports which every normal boy plays as a matter of course. The mere physical exertion, and the fact that you are pitting your brain against another's, will do more toward broadening you than anything I can think of. Doesn't that sound reasonable?"

Rudd nodded slowly.

"Yes, sir, I suppose it does," he agreed. "Only it's going to be mighty hard to begin."

"Most habits are hard to break," Frank smiled. "And this is nothing but a habit. Now, suppose we lay out a rough sort of schedule for you to follow. The manual-training course calls for two hours' work a day. That, of course, you will devote to your model; and I think perhaps another hour, taken the first thing after dinner, can be added to it. Taken in connection with your studies and gym work, that is all the time you ought to spend indoors."

"Only three hours?" Rudd said, in a tone of disappointment.

"Not a minute more," Merry returned emphatically. "The rest of the afternoon you must be outdoors, building up your body and giving your brain something else to think about. Go out to the field and start in by having a catch with another boy. Watch all the regular games, and you'll soon become enthusiastic. Get in with the fellows, and learn to take an interest in everything which goes on at the school. Learn tennis, and go in for track work. With your build, you ought to be rather speedy."

Rudd sighed. The prospect did not appeal to him in the least; but he was sensible enough to see that there was a good deal of reason in it.

"When do you want me to start?" he asked.

"You may as well go out this very afternoon," Merry advised. "You mustn't get discouraged if things don't go smoothly at first. Keep at it just as you've kept at the stabilizing device, and you'll make good. What's more, you'll find your brain fresher by a good deal when you go back to your model, and you'll be able to accomplish a lot more than you can now in three hours."

"All right, sir," Rudd agreed, without enthusiasm. "I'll do as you say."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE AWAKENING OF MORGAN RUDD.

Probably the most difficult thing Morgan Rudd had ever done in his life was to walk out onto the field and find a boy who was willing to have a catch with him. Certainly it was the most unpalatable.

Extraordinary as it may seem, he had never held a baseball in his hand before, save once or twice when he was forced to pick one up and return it to the players, and then he had rolled it along the ground, instead of throwing it.

He was one of those precocious youths who consider such things a waste of valuable time, without realizing that, in turning down everything in the nature of a pastime, he was missing something which he could never make up.

He started from the school at a rapid walk, with the one idea of getting through with an unpleasant duty as soon as possible. But as he neared the field, and saw spread out before him from the slight rise on which he stood the kaleidoscopic mass of color and motion, he slowed down to a crawl, and finally stopped.

Practically the entire school was assembled there. On the diamond the two nines were engaged in a brisk practice game, which was watched by a crowd of spectators who had nothing else to do. Their shouts and joshing criticisms reached Judd's ears plainly, as did the sterner, more biting admonitions of the captain. Outside the diamond, all over the flat, grassy expanse,

boys, more boys, and then some, were scattered. Dozens of baseballs rose and fell in beautiful curves. Here and there an embryo hitter was trying his hand with a bat. Beyond, the tennis courts were all occupied, and several hot sets were in full swing. Boys who had nothing else to do occupied themselves in chasing each other about, or rolling one another aimlessly over the grass in sheer, joyous abandon.

With the shouts and yells and laughter ringing in his ears, Rudd watched it all bewilderedly for a few moments, before he resumed his slow approach. He tried to tell himself that it was all foolish nonsense; but somewhere within him a responsive note was struck which made him feel a vague, regretful disquiet because he was not participating in this sport and frolic.

It took him a long time to find a boy with a ball which was not in use; but at last he spied one standing to one side of the diamond. His request for a catch was met with amused astonishment, and declined without hesitation.

Undaunted, the determined chap continued his search, and, after several rebuffs, he ran into little Pewee Stubbs, his trowsers pocket bulging with the coveted ball, a mammoth mitt dangling from one finger, evidently also in search for some one to pass with him.

He listened to Rudd's request with suspicion, evidently under the impression that some sort of a joke was on foot. At last, however, he was convinced that the lanky fellow was in earnest, and they withdrew a little from the crowd, to begin.

Morgan Rudd will never forget the humiliation of that afternoon. The catching and throwing of a ball had seemed to him such a simple thing that he had anticipated not the slightest difficulty in the performance. His chagrin may be imagined at the instant discovery that there was a decided knack about it.

At first he grew furious at his unspeakable awkwardness, and at the joyous mirth of little Stubbs over the diverting exhibition. This only made things worse, and threatened to bring upon his companion an attack of hysterics.

At that, he cooled again, and gritted his teeth. He was still angry at himself, but it was the cold, calculating sort of anger which stimulates. He vowed that he would get the knack or die.

He did not get it that afternoon, but he improved so decidedly that Pewee assured him, patronizingly, that "he might make a third-rate twirler if he kept it up a few hundred years."

He was at it the next day and the day after. At odd moments he slipped around back of the gym and threw a ball, which he had bought, against the brick wall. He went at the thing in much the same dogged way that he would have tackled a difficulty in aëronautics, and in the end he succeeded.

In learning to throw and catch a ball, he learned something which was infinitely more important, and which had probably been in Frank Merriwell's mind at the very beginning. He came to like being with the fellows out on the field. He came to enjoy the companionship of the other boys, and he no longer had any desire to mope by himself.

He liked to feel that he was a part of that miniature world, even if it was only a very small, unimportant part. He began to share with his companions the awe and reverence which filled their souls at any near approach or notice from those great men who formed the school nine. He took an interest in the games, and became a loyal "rooter," with a chronic hoarseness.

He developed a sense of tidiness in his dress, because he wanted to be like the other boys. He even fixed up his room for that same reason. He got so that he could hold up his end in the joshing game of give and take, and, possessing a quick wit, came at last to have quite a reputation in that regard—a reputation which was viewed with disgustful rage by Otis Burton.

Burton's enmity for Rudd had never ceased; he had lost no opportunity for sneering and backbiting. As the weeks passed into months, however, his efforts became less and less effective. Tolerated at first by the great mass of boys, Rudd began to rise in their estimation bit by bit as he developed. His life in the open air soon began to show in an erect carriage, a firm walk, and a vastly increased animation of manner.

His cheeks, once rather pallid, now glowed with health, and his eyes no longer wore that dreamy, trancelike expression. He took to tennis like a duck to water, and gained the admiration of many by his remarkable ability as a swimmer.

In proportion as Rudd blossomed out, Burton's slurs and innuendoes failed of their effect, and in that same degree the ill-natured chap's hatred gained

strength and venom. He felt that Rudd suspected him of having maliciously destroyed the model, and that added to the flame of his anger until he became almost "skewed" on the subject.

Rudd treated him with a calm indifference. His ready tongue was always equal to a verbal battle with Burton, and the latter was too much of a coward to resort to an open quarrel.

All this took time—a great deal of time. April slipped away into May; and June appeared almost before Rudd realized it. His model was progressing slowly, but surely. He did not work rapidly, but with infinite care, and he found that his interest never flagged, as it had sometimes done in the days gone by. With the other healthy diversions which took up so much of his time, he never grew stale, and always entered that little room off the pattern shop with an elastic tread and sparkling, eager eyes.

Merriwell came often to watch the progress of the miniature aëroplane, and always he marveled at the boy's expertness and invention. He had brought all the powers of his brilliant mind to bear upon the stabilizing device, and could find no flaw in it. Extraordinary as it appeared, he had at last to admit the possibility of success, and, thinking of all that success would mean, he grew almost impatient for the completion of the model.

As June neared the end, it was apparent that this would not come about until after the dismissal of the boys for the brief interval of two weeks which came between the end of school proper and the beginning of the summer camp.

Frank was not especially sorry, for it would give them an opportunity for trying out the model in perfect security from interruption. It thus came about that, when the other boys departed with much joyful clamor and horseplay, Morgan Rudd remained behind without a single regret. His chance was coming swiftly, and, whenever he thought of it, his heart glowed with gratitude toward the man who had made it possible.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE FUTURE BRIGHTENS.

"Finished!"

As he uttered the word, Merriwell advanced into the room and stood beside the boy who had just put the last touch to the exquisite model on the table before him.

It was a wonderful piece of work, but the perfection and delicacy of workmanship paled into insignificance before the surpassing importance of the device which had emanated from the lad's brain. If it worked successfully, a tremendous stride toward the conquest of the air would have been made.

The tiny but perfect gasoline motor had been made according to the specifications of the young inventor and paid for by the master of the school.

Rudd's cheeks were flushed and his eyes bright with excitement as he watched Merriwell's close examination of the model. At last he could contain himself no longer.

"Shall we try it out this afternoon, sir?" he asked breathlessly.

Merry glanced out of the window. The day was cloudy, and low, swiftly flying gusts of dingy gray showed how high the wind had become.

"If she worked on a day like this, it would be the best possible test," he said slowly. "But do we want to risk ruining the work of all these weeks? The smallest possible defect would do it, you know."

Rudd nodded comprehendingly.

"I understand, sir," he said quietly. "But I've been mighty careful, and I don't think there are any defects."

Frank suppressed a smile at this display of ingenuous egotism.

"Well, since you're game, we'll do it now," he returned. "The wind's not strong enough actually to blow it away, but if this stabilizing device doesn't work, I'm afraid it will be smashed on the ground."

"Still, if we don't try it on a windy day," put in Rudd, "we won't have a complete proof of anything. Besides, if it should be broken, I can make another one."

"There speaks the true inventor." Merry laughed. "You have perfect faith and indomitable perseverance. You take one side, and we'll carry it downstairs now."

They did so, stopping only for gasoline to fill the miniature tank, and went on out of the building toward the athletic field. Here, pausing in the shelter of a tree, they filled the tank and took a last look over everything.

"I can't see a thing out of place," Rudd declared.

"Nor I," Frank agreed. "We may as well set things going. I propose that we fasten the rudder so that the monoplane will make a wide circle. It's the only way, unless we fasten a long cord or wire to it to keep it from flying off, and that wouldn't be so satisfactory, anyhow. If your machine will ride steady in this wind while constantly circling, there

isn't a single doubt in my mind that the device is practicable."

Rudd agreed to the suggestion instantly, and they set about making the steering apparatus fast. This done, the engine was started and let run for a few moments, the two companions watching it anxiously.

Though the boy was nervous and excited, while Merry remained perfectly calm and self-contained, it is a question which of them was really the more anxious over the result.

More, perhaps, than the lad himself, Merry realized the immense importance of the invention. Well versed as he was in the science of aëronautics, the man had long ago seen that one weak point of all aëroplanes was their lack of stability. There were numerous methods, to be sure, for keeping the equilibrium by means of moving the wings, but all of them had to be operated by the driver, and were more or less uncertain. The perfect automatic device was the ideal method; and, if this boy had discovered it, he had succeeded where every one else had failed.

"We'll have to set her going from a height," Merry said, in a thoughtful tone. "The elevating rudder should be left level, or she may soar away from us."

"How would the top of the stand do?" Rudd suggested.

"Very well, I should think," Merry returned. "There isn't a tree within a thousand feet, and we could lift her high enough to escape hitting any of the seats."

Stopping the engine, they carried the monoplane

carefully over to the field and up to the top tier of uncovered seats. There was no more delay now. Starting the engine again, Frank lifted the model as high as he could, assisted to some extent by Rudd, and a moment later it was launched into the air.

The next instant their hearts were in their throats as a gust struck the frail craft and tilted it to a dangerous degree. For a second it seemed as if nothing could prevent the equilibrium from being destroyed. Then, marvelously, just as a bird flies, they beheld the other wing move to restore the balance.

A deep sigh of relief came from both man and boy, but they did not speak. With nerves tingling, and with alternately flushing and paling faces, they watched the aëroplane sweep around the field in a wide circle.

To be strictly accurate, its path was more in the nature of an ellipse, for the strong breeze could not help but accelerate its progress in one direction and retard it in another. Time and time again came that dangerous tilting of one wing, only to be followed as surely by the reflex action of the other.

Around and around the field the machine swept like a great bird flying. Presently they hastened down from the seats and stood ready to receive it when the gasoline should have been used up.

The engine chugged away for some time longer, but at last the explosions grew irregular, and presently stopped.

Instantly it began to float downward; but the wind, catching it, carried it along the field, so that they had to run at the top of their speed to prevent it from landing too strenuously.

It was recovered not twenty feet from a tree, and, after lowering it to the ground, Frank straightened up, his face glowing with enthusiasm.

"Couldn't be better, Morgan!" he exclaimed, extending his hand. "I verily believe you've done it."

Thrilled with joy and excitement, the boy clasped his hand. It seemed too wonderful to be true; and, as he stood there looking into Merry's fine eyes, and thinking what the future might bring forth, he could not have spoken to save his life.

Seeing how moved he was, Frank bent to do something to the little model. When he glanced up again, the boy had recovered his self-control.

"I'm so glad," he said, his eyes glowing. "I wanted it to succeed so much. Do you suppose anybody would take it up now and manufacture a real machine from this model?"

Frank laughed.

"I know one who would," he chuckled. "This is my plan, Morgan: I will at once order the parts for a full-sized monoplane to be sent here. The parts for the safety device can be obtained from several different factories, so there won't be any danger of its leaking out. Moreover, I'll apply at once for a patent on it. When you return in the fall we'll put the machine together here and try her out. If she proves successful—and I have no doubt she will—then we'll invite Captain Baldwin to come down and see her fly. You'd just as soon give him the first chance of using the device, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, yes, sir," Rudd gasped. "But you're too good altogether. You've done enough—already."

"Don't worry about that, Morgan," Frank said lightly. "I shall be more than repaid by the knowledge of having helped a little toward giving to the world something which will mark another giant stride in the science of aëronautics."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE TEST.

At Merriwell's advice, Morgan Rudd spent the summer entirely out of doors. He tried to eliminate all thoughts of the aëroplane from his mind, and devoted his attention entirely to swimming, canoeing, mountain climbing, and all sorts of open-air sports and pastimes.

The result was that he had a tremendous appetite, slept like a log ten hours each night, and when September came he was hard as nails, brown as a berry, and feeling better than he had ever felt in his life before.

His appearance was so transformed that scarcely one of the fellows who had not been with him in the summer recognized, at first sight, in this tanned, bright-eyed, smiling chap, the boy they had parted with only three months before.

His manner was changed, too. Though his first thought was for his monoplane, and the first thing he did was to hurry over to the rough wooden shed which had been erected at the edge of the woods beyond the football field for the assembling of the various parts, he kept to his plan of mingling with the fellows and giving his brain a chance for developing broadly.

He did not go in for football, because he knew that he would not be able to give the time necessary to

regular practice; but he went to every game, and rooted as enthusiastically for his team as any one else. He kept up his tennis, however, and frequently took part in the brisk games of land hockey, which were gotten up almost every day after the football teams had vacated the field.

A considerable amount of spare time, however, was spent in the wooden shed where, with Merry's assistance, the monoplane was assembled, slowly but surely.

As this child of his brain grew steadily from a mass of seemingly incongruous parts into a finished whole, Rudd's delight and pleasure increased by leaps and bounds. Mingled with his joy was a little awe. Sometimes, especially toward the end, as he stood silently surveying the wide-spread planes, the trim, shipshape framework, and the compactly arranged engine, stabilizing device, and various other parts, he found himself wondering whether it was really going to prove successful. Could it be possible that he had actually solved the problem which had been the despair of so many vastly abler brains than his?

The successful flight of the little model had been more than encouraging, to be sure, but models had been known to work before this, and their larger replicas fail.

This thought of failure frightened him. He felt as if he could not bear it after the high hopes which had been raised within him. He kept this dread to himself; but, somehow, Merriwell sensed a little of what was going on in the boy's mind. It was a very natural reaction from the optimism which had come after the trial of the model, coupled with an unavoid-

able anxiety lest something go wrong at the last moment.

He did his best to reassure the boy, but he himself was not feeling so certain of results as to be perfectly confident. Some slight, seemingly trivial, thing, so small as to make no difference in the flight of the model, was as likely to prove their undoing as if a big, vital principle had been wrongly applied.

"All the same," he said cheerfully one day, "we can't afford to waste energy in useless worry. We'll use every possible care in constructing the machine, and no human being can do more. After that, we shall have to trust more or less in Providence. We want to make up our minds that it's going to succeed, at the same time preparing ourselves as best we can for failure, and then stop worrying."

Rudd, clad in greasy overalls and smudged from head to foot with dirt and oil, tried to smile cheerfully. After that, he did his best to follow Frank's advice; but, as the time drew near for their initial attempts at flight, he could not help growing more and more nervous and worried.

Naturally, the news that an aëroplane was being put together in that mysterious shed beyond the football field swiftly spread throughout the school and excited a vast deal of interest. Boys were constantly hanging about, gazing in wonder at the rough, square structure with the great doors in front; but that was as far as they ever got. Frank had built the shed with that idea in view, and the light all came from skylights in the roof, thus making it impossible to see anything from the outside.

Opinion was divided as to Rudd's part in the affair. Many of the boys were frankly incredulous, and refused to believe that he could have had anything to do with the invention of the machine. They decided that he might be handy with tools and at machinery, and on that account had been selected by Merriwell to help in the work.

This view was fostered on every possible occasion by Otis Burton, who was furious at the attention the fellow he hated was attracting. He lost no chance to sneer at Rudd and at the aëroplane, assuring every one who would listen to him that the thing would never get a foot off the ground.

Others, and they were decidedly in the minority, thought that there must be something in it, or Frank Merriwell would never waste so much time in the shed. Whether it was his invention or Rudd's, they had no idea.

The latter was, of course, questioned at all times and places, but he gave little satisfaction. He was always good-humored and smiling, and generally turned the inquiries of his curious companions off with a joke. He kept his own counsel, however, and the fellows were always obliged to desist, without becoming any the wiser.

The thrill which had accompanied the completion of the model was as nothing compared to that which followed the tightening of the last bolt on the finished machine.

To Rudd it seemed as if the great, winged creature was something alive, whose behavior was fraught with infinite possibilities; and, as he stood looking at

it, he felt a rush of that awe which had come to him more than once before.

What was it going to do, once life, in the shape of motive power, was given it? How was it going to behave? Would it soar through the air, as they had every right to expect, or would it crash to the ground, sweeping away in a single moment the work of many weeks?

He did not know. No one could predict with any certainty. They could only trust to Providence, as Merriwell had said they should, and take their lives into their hands, as does every man who attempts to conquer the air.

Frank had decided that the initial trip had better take place at night. It would be utterly impossible for them to attempt it in the daytime without an audience of the entire school, and that he was anxious to avoid. In case anything went wrong, he wished to run no needless risk of life, such as would follow a sudden buckling of the machine and a plunging down into a crowd.

Consequently, the fact that the aëroplane was finished was kept a profound secret from every one. Even Inza, Merry's wife, knew nothing about it; and when Frank left the house, after supper one night, he did it quietly and casually, as if he were simply going for one of his frequent evening strolls.

Rudd also took great care in slipping out of the school. They met in front of the shed without having aroused the suspicions of a soul as to what was up, save only Toots, Merry's negro coachman, who had been summoned to the scene as a matter of pre-

caution in case of something happening which might disable them both.

The night was clear and cold. Millions of stars sprinkled the blue-black arch above them, and a fairly strong westerly breeze was blowing.

Quietly, Frank unlocked the great double doors, and threw them open. Within, like a mammoth, ghostly bird, the white outlines of the aëroplane gleamed vaguely through the darkness. Behind them, Toots' teeth were chattering.

"For de Lawd, Marse Frank!" he gasped. "You-all ain' goin' fur to set dat fing loose?"

"Never you mind what we're going to do, Toots," Merry answered. "You don't have to go up in it. All you have to do is to stand here and watch."

He lighted a lantern and went carefully over every part of the monoplane for the last time, without finding a single thing out of place. Then he turned to Rudd.

"I'd rather go up alone, Morgan, at first," he said. "Do you mind?"

The boy hesitated an instant. He was no longer nervous. That had passed, leaving him cool and fearless.

"Don't you think it will hold two?" he asked quietly.

"Ye-es, but——"

"I'm not a bit afraid," Rudd assured him. "I'd hate awfully to miss the first trip."

Frank did not answer for a second. He seemed to be thinking it over.

"Very well," he agreed at last. "Get into something warm. You brought your sweater, didn't you?"

The youth nodded, and they proceeded at once to get into sweaters, leggings, and other garments which had been stored in the shed a day or so before.

Toots stood watching them, his eyes staring and an expression of intense horror and despair on his face. When Merriwell turned on the gas and started the engine, with the machine still "anchored," he jumped as if shot, and gave vent to a moan. In a moment, however, Merry shut off the spark, after which he set the machine free from its moorings.

The engine was equipped with a self-starting device. Frank took his place in the driver's seat, while Rudd climbed into the one behind him. There was a second of intense stillness, during which the boy could feel his heart thudding loudly against his ribs. The next instant Frank pressed the starting button, and the monoplane shot smoothly past the horrified negro, whose face had turned a sickly sort of gray, out through the wide doors, and into the night.

Merry let her run for a few hundred feet, and then gently moved the elevating lever. With a soaring swoop, the machine left the earth and shot into the air, quivering a little under the force of the wind, but otherwise perfectly balanced.

At an elevation of some thirty feet, Frank restored her to a horizontal position, swerved slightly to one side, and shot out across the football field.

They were above the seats and goal posts, and the starlight was bright enough to show up the dark bulk of trees that linked one side of the open space, so that there was no danger of running into obstacles.

Straight down the field they went, still keeping in

perfect balance, in spite of the strong wind which was blowing. It looked very much as if the stabilizing device was working perfectly, and Rudd felt a blissful calm descending upon him as he sat clutching the framework, with the chill night air blowing unheeded on his face.

All his worry and anxiety had been for naught. He had succeeded beyond his expectations.

Again the plane was elevated, and they curved up above the treetops. A wide sweep headed them back toward the shed, and a moment later they passed over it, barely able to discern the frightened face of Toots, visible in the light of the lantern, as he stared up at them.

Turning again, Merriwell increased the speed, and they shot back over the field. Another turn, and Merry shut off the engine, and, with plane depressed, swooped easily and gracefully to earth, making a perfect landing, and stopping not twenty feet from the moaning, trembling negro.

"Praise de Lawd!" the latter ejaculated. "I never done 'spec' ter see yo'-all ag'in. Ah's mos' sick with t'ankfulness you come down safe."

"We're pretty glad ourselves, Toots," Merry laughed, as he stepped out of the machine.

His face was radiant, and he turned swiftly to Rudd.

"It's all right, boy," he exclaimed. "You've succeeded. I'll wire Captain Baldwin to-morrow."

He held out his hand, and Rudd gripped it tightly. Something seemed to catch him by the throat, though, and he could not utter a word.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE BOY WHO MEDDLED.

The great day had arrived, and the school was thrilled with the excitement of it. Directly after the football game, which had been started early on that account, a public flight of the mysterious aëroplane, which had been puzzling every one to an almost intolerable degree for two months, was to come off.

More interesting than that, even, were the rumors that one of the most famous air men of the age would be present, having come all the way from New York for the purpose of inspecting an invention which was said to be actually revolutionary.

There were whispers that this invention was the work of Morgan Rudd, but these were not generally credited. That Frank Merriwell had done something wonderful in the line of invention seemed perfectly natural, for there was scarcely a boy in the school who did not have implicit faith in the man's ability to accomplish almost anything. To believe that one of their own number, a fellow of only seventeen, who had always been regarded as more or less queer, should be the inventor, seemed absurd.

Nevertheless, Morgan Rudd was looked upon by almost every one with a sort of respectful wonder. Even if he was not responsible for the planning of the aëroplane, he had been taken into Merriwell's confidence, and knew all about it. It was even rumored

that he knew how to operate the machine, and all the morning he was surrounded by a crowd of eager, curious boys, athirst for information.

The sight maddened Otis Burton. He went about sneering and jeering at Rudd and at the flying machine in an almost incoherent manner, assuring every one that the whole thing would be a fizzle, that the aëroplane would never get a foot off the ground.

Considering the general feeling about the school, his attitude was a mistaken one. He discovered this very soon by the manner in which he was thrown down good and hard, and told very plainly that he was jealous of Rudd's reputation and popularity.

This, of course, only added fuel to the flame of his resentment, which flared up hotter than ever.

"Darn fools!" he muttered furiously, after the last and most trying rebuff. "They'll find out mighty quick that I'm right. They make me sick, the whole lot of 'em."

He was so irritated and disgusted that he resolved to go off on his wheel, and cut both the game and the exhibition, which was to follow it. In his innermost heart he had a hateful fear that, after all, there might be something in the persistent rumors of a wonderful discovery having been made by Merriwell and Rudd; and he had no desire to be a witness to the latter's triumph.

He got out his bicycle and started slowly across the flat, smooth, grassy expanse along the side of the football field. It was a short cut to the village road, and Burton presently got a glimpse, through a fringe of trees, of the shed which housed the aëroplane.

Unconsciously he slowed down. The place was shut up, but his keen eyes saw a figure hurrying toward it, which must be Rudd. During the morning, Merriwell had strictly forbidden any of the boys to go near the spot. The aëroplane would have to be taken out of the shed early in the afternoon, and he was afraid that some of them, in examining it, might do some damage.

Otis scowled fiercely; and then, pedaling hard again, swerved into a path leading through the trees, down a steep slope and into the road. At Bloomfield he stopped at the store, and had two sodas in solitary state.

Not one of the fellows was to be seen, for the game must by this time have commenced. Burton was not sorry. He did not want to see any one at the present moment; and, besides, at no time was he noted for an eagerness to treat.

Having satisfied his appetite for sweets at a minimum cost, he mounted the wheel again and rode out of the village.

It was perhaps half past three when he returned, hot, tired, and still angry. At the entrance to the short cut, he dismounted and walked his machine up the steep slope, mounted it again, and then, just as he had reached the point from which he could see the shed through the trees, he suddenly leaped to the ground and stood still.

During his absence the aëroplane had been brought outside the building, and now stood in the open, a little way from the door. As he saw for the first time the gleaming white of the wide-spread planes,

the intricate framework beneath, and all the various parts over which Merriwell and Rudd had labored so long and carefully, he was decidedly impressed.

Somehow, he had not expected anything like this. It was all so much bigger and looked so much more shipshape than he had pictured it to himself, that his heart sank in a sudden doubt as to whether he might not, after all, be wrong.

"Rot!" he muttered, the next moment. "Just because it's big, it doesn't follow that it'll fly."

Trundling his bicycle, he walked a little nearer. Presently he saw that there was no one near the thing. It had been moved some twenty feet or more to the right of the shed, apparently so that it could be headed straight for the football field and the open space beyond.

"Wonder where Rudd is?" he thought curiously. "Perhaps he's gone back to the school for something, or maybe he's in the shed."

A moment later, drawn by irrepressible curiosity, he had left the trees and was advancing softly toward the machine. He kept a keen eye on the shed, but could see no one about it nor hear any sounds which would indicate that the fellow he hated was inside.

From the field came the crashing roars of concerted cheering which told him that Farnham Hall had done something good. It was almost time for the game to be finished, he thought, and then, in a flash, an idea came into his mind.

He stopped and listened. Not a sound came from the shed. Perhaps Rudd had slipped over to see the end of the game. An opportunity such as this would never come again. If he could only do some little thing to the aëroplane which would spoil the whole exhibition and cover Rudd with shame, he would have squared the score between them.

A moment later he had reached the side of the machine and let his wheel slip to the ground. Circling one of the great planes, he stepped close to the side of the framework and looked about him curiously.

There were two seats, one behind the other, and near the front one he saw several levers and other bits of mechanism, none of which could be reached from the ground.

A moment later he had climbed cautiously into the seat and was looking swiftly about for some means to accomplish his purpose. He pressed on one of the levers gingerly, but it did not move. He examined something which looked like the spark and throttle device on an automobile, but was different in one or two respects.

There were apparently no nuts which he could remove, nor any other small parts the loss of which might injure the machine. Presently he bent over to examine a boxlike arrangement, and a moment later his finger pressed lightly on a button in the center.

Instantly there was a jarring vibration, and, to his horror, the aëroplane began to move slowly forward. With a cry of fear, he half arose to his feet, one hand clutching unconsciously at the spark and throttle levers, causing the machine, with a rattling volley of

explosions, to leap forward with a jerk that threw him back into the seat, white and panic-stricken.

As he shot forward across the smooth grass, he gave another loud cry, which was answered from behind.

"Stop! Stop!" yelled Rudd's voice frantically.

He must have been in the shed all the time. Even in the midst of his awful fear, Burton found himself wishing desperately that the boy he hated had stepped out a little sooner, and had prevented him from climbing into this hateful, diabolical thing, which was running away with him.

Stop? He would have given anything he possessed to do it, but he could not. His fingers fluttered nervously among the bewildering mechanism, which was as incomprehensible to him as Greek. He tried to be calm and to reason. There must be some way of stopping it. Where was the switch which would shut off the current? Frantically he searched, but could not find it. There must be some sort of a brake. He had never heard of any moving machine without a break. Was it one of those other levers?

His heart was thudding loudly against his ribs. Perspiration burst forth upon his forehead, and he turned actually sick with fright. He must stop it—he must!

At last, he barely touched the hateful throttle lever again, and the aëroplane seemed to leap forward along the ground with a jolt which took his breath away, and made him cry out once more.

After that he lost his head.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE HERO OF THE AIR.

"Suppose we stop here a minute or two and see the finish of the game, captain," Merry said. "I told Rudd we would show up at four, and, if you don't mind, I'd rather not get there ahead of time. He's preparing everything for a flight, and it would be too bad to drop in on him before he's ready."

Captain Baldwin, the famous air man, acquiesced, without hesitation. He was not a youth, but there was something about his big frame and smooth-shaven face, with those calm, level eyes, which attracted attention wherever he went. He had the look of a man who has done things, and who possesses ability far above the ordinary, without being in the least conspicuous or peculiar.

"Of course," he agreed, with a pleasant smile which lit up his whole face. "The young man deserves every consideration, and we must not surprise him before he is quite ready for us."

They moved forward to the side lines, the crowd of boys parting instantly to make room for them, and one and all regarding the captain with the same lively interest which had followed him ever since he first appeared at the school an hour before.

For a moment or two they watched the progress of the game, which had already practically been won by the home team, Frank with the keen interest a contest

of that sort always aroused in him, and his companion with a palpable effort to drag his thoughts for a moment away from the thing which was absorbing him.

"You have a splendid lot of boys, Frank," he said presently. "Fine, manly fellows, every one of them."

"They are that," Merry agreed instantly. "Apparent exceptions crop up now and then; but I have never found a boy who was incorrigible. They all have good qualities, if you can only get at them."

"That's it, if you can get at them! All men can't. I venture to say that there is not one who does not leave here a better chap than when he came to you."

Merriwell laughed a little.

"That's what I'm here for," he returned. "That's the object of the school in a nutshell."

The captain did not answer. His eyes were fixed on the field before him, where the Farnham Hall team was rushing the ball toward their goal, opposed desperately but ineffectually by the rival team. Presently a touchdown was made, and the wild bursts of cheering from the spectators made speech for a time impossible.

When the bedlam had somewhat died away, the older man turned again to Merriwell.

"Do you know, Frank," he said, "the more I think of this inventor of yours, the more incredible the whole thing seems. With absolutely no reflection on your judgment, I can scarcely believe that a mere boy has succeeded where so many more mature, experienced men have failed utterly."

Merry smiled.

"I don't blame you in the least, captain," he answered. "I felt exactly that way myself. When Rudd first told me of his stabilizing device, I was perfectly sure there could be nothing in it. I thought he might have conceived something ingenious which would appear to be what he supposed it; but that he had actually solved the great problem was incredible. Even after the model worked successfully, I was not convinced entirely."

"You are now?" queried the captain.

Frank nodded.

"Perfectly," he said emphatically. "After our first flight, there has been no further doubt in my mind, and there will not be in yours an hour from now."

Captain Baldwin drew a long breath.

"I remain open to conviction," he said good-humoredly. "Isn't it almost four?"

"Ten minutes of," Merriwell smiled, consulting his watch. "I think we may start over there."

The goal had been kicked, and, as they left the crowd and started slowly across the turf, the teams lined up for the scant two minutes which remained of the last quarter.

"Am I to be allowed a seat during the first ascen——"

The captain broke off abruptly, and stopped short, his eyes fixed intently on the distant shed. The barking of a gas motor drifted to their ears.

"The monoplane is moving," he said, in a puzzled tone. "I thought he was to wait until we came?"

Merriwell's face was bewildered.

"That was the plan," he said tersely, not taking his

eyes from the winged machine, which was advancing rapidly toward them on its rubber-tired wheels. "I don't understand this move. Rudd is not the sort for making a spectacular exhibition."

A sudden cry came faintly to their ears and galvanized both men into instant life.

"Something's wrong!" exclaimed the captain, as they started to run forward.

Merriwell said nothing. His face was slightly pale, and in his eyes was a great dread. He had seen the figure of Rudd rush wildly out of the shed, stare for an instant after the moving machine, and then run forward and stoop for a moment over something on the ground. The next second he was mounted on a bicycle, and launched in swift pursuit of the aëroplane.

"What is it?" asked the captain, as he caught a glimpse of his companion's face. "What's happened? It's not running away. I see the boy in the driver's seat."

"So do I," Frank snapped back. "It's not the right boy, though. Some one has meddled. Rudd is behind on the bicycle."

"Great mercy!" gasped the older man, startled out of his calm. "We must do something! We must stop her!"

Frank made no answer, but almost at once he ceased running and stood still.

The aëroplane was headed straight toward them, running now at a more rapid speed than before, but still on the ground.

Merry recognized the white, frightened face of

Burton, and saw him frantically seeking with both hands to find some way of stopping the thing. Behind, Rudd, on the bicycle, was rapidly gaining. If nothing happened, he would catch up with the machine before it reached the two waiting men.

"Burton!" Merry shouted at the top of his voice. "Sit still! Touch nothing!"

Either the strong, gusty wind carried his words away, or the boy was too far gone with fright to heed them. With his heart in his throat, Merry saw those flitting hands move ceaselessly among the levers. At any second he might touch one which would elevate the plane and send him into the air.

Like a flash, Rudd rounded one tail plane and shot inward. With a lithe spring he was off the wheel and leaping toward the framework.

An instant later, Frank's sigh of relief changed to a gasp of horror. Rudd's fingers had scarcely touched the side of the aëroplane, close to the empty passenger seat, when Burton yanked at something, and the great machine left the earth in a long, swooping glide, which took it just over the heads of the two men.

As they glanced swiftly upward, they caught a single glimpse of the boy clinging to the framework, his legs dangling without support. Then the monoplane shot onward and upward, and they gazed after it with white, despairing faces.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE TRIUMPH OF GENIUS.

For an instant they stood in helpless, petrified silence. Then the captain groaned.

"They'll both be killed!" he exclaimed. "He'll never make it. Look!"

A sudden gust striking the apparently overbalanced machine, it tilted dangerously, one wing sweeping down, down, until the whole thing looked as if it were almost on edge.

"If it touches the ground, he's lost," muttered the older man, little beads of perspiration breaking out on his forehead. "It'll crumple like a sheet of paper."

Frank uttered no sound, but the look on his face showed how much he was suffering. He was blind and deaf to everything but the thing upon which his every sense seemed focused. He did not even feel the painful grip the captain had on his arm.

The moment seemed like an eternity. Then, slowly, like a wounded bird putting forth every effort of its strength, one great wing rose little by little, while the other depresesd itself to bring the whole back into balance.

The breath whistled through the captain's teeth, and his hold on Frank's arm relaxed. Still neither of them spoke. The monoplane was agitated again and again, and they could see it veer from one side to the other under the great and unusual strain.

Scarcely daring to breathe, they watched, hoping now against hope, that the boy might, after all, be able to master it.

As the winged creature swept over the football field every voice was hushed, every sound quelled, until it seemed as if that whole great crowd of boys had been stricken breathless.

Suddenly a low moan went up, more eloquent by far than the loudest clamor, as one wing tilted dangerously again. But, as before, the device worked automatically to restore equilibrium, and a cheer, louder than any which had greeted the good work of the eleven, arose from the watching boys, as they saw that Rudd had managed to lift himself over the framework and reach the vacant seat. Then the aëroplane was swept onward over the fringe of trees and out of sight.

Then, and only then, did the tension relax. With a deep sigh, Captain Baldwin took out a handkerchief and passed it over his moistened forehead.

"Marvelous!" he ejaculated. "In my whole experience with aëroplanes I have never seen anything like it."

With an effort, Frank turned from where he was staring vainly after the vanished monoplane, and looked at his companion.

"The test could not very well have been more severe," he said quietly. "I think they are both safe."

Baldwin nodded emphatically.

"Absolutely," he agreed. "A boy who has the nerve to do what he did will make small work of getting at the control."

He hesitated an instant, his eyes gleaming with enthusiasm.

"The perfection of the device is proved beyond a doubt," he went on quickly. "There can be no possible question of its being automatic!"

"None whatever. The boy in the driver's seat knows nothing about operating. He could not possibly have restored the equilibrium by anything he did."

"Certainly not. That is out of the question. I wish they'd come back. I shan't feel comfortable until a landing is made."

"Nor I," Merry agreed, "though I have faith in Rudd's ability to manipulate the machine."

They started rapidly toward the field, and just as they reached the first crowd of upward-staring boys, a shout arose, and the aëroplane was seen above the treetops, headed in their direction.

Swiftly it approached, buzzing like a monster humming bird, and swooping over the trees and downward toward the field in a long, easy glide. As it came on, the speed was cut down.

Perfectly steady, in spite of the gusty, treacherous wind, it sailed over the field at an elevation of some fifty feet. Rudd sat in the driver's seat, his face calm and composed and glowing with a strange light. Behind him cowered the meddling Burton, pallid as a sheet of paper, trembling like a leaf, and clutching the sides of the seat with a terror-stricken grip.

Amid a tense, awe-struck silence, the machine passed, swooped swiftly down, and came to rest gently on the open ground beyond, after running some distance on the wheels.

Then, as Rudd stepped from his seat and turned to help out his frightened passenger, a roar of delight and relief went up such as had never been heard on the field before, and, with one accord, the boys started forward in a wild rush.

Pell-mell they passed Frank and his companion. In an instant, they reached the young aviator, and, paying no heed to his protestations, hoisted him up to their shoulders.

He protested laughingly, but they would not let him down. Instead, they turned back, and bore him toward the spot where the two men stood, the air resounding with his name yelled from hundreds of throats.

As they let him slip, at last, from their hold, he stood for a moment with flushed face and slightly trembling lips, his eyes, bright with emotion, staring into those calm, level ones of Baldwin.

For a second they stood thus, the man who had devoted his life to the conquest of the air, and had made his name famous the world over, and this stripling in his teens. Then Baldwin stepped forward and held out his hand.

"My boy," he said, with his pleasant, transforming smile, "I congratulate you. You have done something which many men have so far striven in vain to accomplish, and which will make your name famous. Better than mere fame, however, your genius has resulted in something which will infinitely lessen the risks of aviation, and will surely revolutionize the construction of aëroplanes."

As Rudd gripped the hand in his, he had to catch

his lips between his teeth to keep them from trembling. It was a moment of happiness and triumph such as he had never dreamed of, but the excitement and tension he had just been through made him unstrung.

"Thank—you, sir," he stammered, with difficulty. "You are—very—good to say—that."

The captain laughed a little. He saw the boy's nervousness, and divined its cause perfectly.

"Not good—only truthful," he returned pleasantly. "Eh, Frank?"

He glanced around at Merry, who had been standing a little behind him, his face reflecting the boy's joy and triumph.

"Exactly," Merriwell agreed, smiling. "Only truthful. Suppose you show the captain your device, Morgan. I think he's anxious to inspect it in detail."

Thankful for something which would take the universal attention away from him, Rudd hastened to lead the way toward the aëroplane. He was not to escape so easily, however. The boys crowded around him once more, and presently their voices were raised in crashing bursts of sound:

"Rudd! Rudd! Rudd!"

There was a spontaneous enthusiasm in the sound which brought the blood pouring back into the boy's face and tingling in his finger tips. Such moments do not come often, but they are well worth living for.

Slinking over the field toward the school, head down and face still pallid, was another boy, to whom those cheers were like so many knife thrusts. Strangely enough, he felt no envy, only a bitter, intense regret,

for those few dreadful moments had taught him a lesson which would never be forgotten.

Soon after this the general interest of Merriwell's lads was again centered in football—principally because of the amusing incidents connected with the "breaking in" of Billy Cromwell on the gridiron.

CHAPTER XXXV.

BILLY CROMWELL'S ARRIVAL.

When Billy Cromwell arrived at Farnham Hall, late in September, he never had seen a football. But, then, there were a good many things about the school which were new to Billy—so new and strange, in fact, as to arouse feelings of carefully concealed wonder in his mind.

Billy had spent every one of his sixteen years on his father's ranch in Arizona. The outfit was a large one, and Billy was the only youngster about the place. Consequently, those sixteen years had been one long succession of joyous, happy days, uncurbed and unrestrained by disagreeable duties or trying parental interference.

Billy did not remember his mother. She had died when he was barely a year old, leaving him to the care of his father, whose mind was already so taken up with the business of making his ranch the largest and best paying in the State, that there was little room left for bestowing much care on his only son.

For three years a succession of Mexican women, varied now and then by one of good old American stock, performed the duties of nurse. Toward the end, their arrival and departure was so nearly synonymous as to cause the elder Cromwell no small vexation.

The climax was reached when Billy insinuated a harmless, but extremely active, snake between the sheets

of his nurse's bed, throwing the woman into hysterics, and causing her to shake the dust of the Cromwell ranch house from her feet with great precipitation, and to the accompaniment of some home truths which were much to the point.

She was the last of a long line of harassed, distracted females. A week followed during which John Cromwell could not spare the time necessary for going to town. Then, just as he was on the point of starting —with some reluctance, it must be said—he happened to encounter his troublesome offspring astride of a small pony which one of the infatuated cow-punchers had secretly broken and trained to docility. This he had taught the child to ride.

That settled the nurse question for good and all. A boy who could ride as fearlessly and well as this one had no need of a woman to look after him.

With a sigh of relief, Cromwell turned his horse and rode back to the distant round-up, and Billy's independence dated from that moment.

Absolutely fearless and with a very winning personality, he soon became the pet of the bunk house and spent a great deal more time there than with his father. The punchers taught him to shoot and ride and rope, and by the time he was twelve he could manage anything in the way of horseflesh on the ranch, was hard as nails, and could lick his weight in wild cats in a rough-and-tumble, unscientific manner.

He was often away from the ranch house for weeks at a time, visiting the different line camps or going off into the mountains by himself to hunt.

Several times, during the four years which followed,

his father insisted upon his attending the nearest school, which was twenty miles away. There Billy made the teacher's life so miserable that she was only too glad to forgive his long and frequently repeated absences.

The result was that he reached the age of sixteen with only the most sketchy sort of an education, and his ignorance of so many things which boys half his age have at their tongue's end was positively appalling.

Happily for him—though he did not see it in that light—there arrived at the ranch about this time a friend of his father's, from Chicago. This friend at once sensed the situation and lost no time in showing John Cromwell the error of his ways.

"It's perfectly appalling, John," he said, at the conclusion of a caustic little exposition of the facts. "You've let the boy run wild, and he doesn't know as much as the average child of ten. You should send him away to school instantly."

The elder Cromwell flushed guiltily.

"I reckon you're right, Jim," he acknowledged. "I've had so much on my mind that I've let things slide. He's been to school over at Benson every winter for three years, though. I sure don't see what he did with his time there."

"Woman teacher, I suppose," remarked James Blancombe shortly.

Cromwell nodded.

"Sure," he returned.

"He probably spent about half the time cutting up and the other half playing hooky," Blancombe said

shrewdly. "What he needs is a man's hand. Billy's as nice a boy as I ever knew, John, but he's had his own way so long that he's getting spoiled. What you want to do is to put the curb on right away and send him to a boy's school where he'll have a good, healthy amount of discipline, and be thrown with a lot of boys his own age. There's nothing like it to show a chap that he isn't the only little pebble on the beach."

"That's so, Jim," Cromwell admitted. "I've been a fool to let it go so long. Trouble is I don't know beans about schools, and I might get him into a bad one that would be a heap worse than none at all."

"You can't make a mistake if you send him to the American School of Athletic Development," Blancombe returned. "It's run by a man named Merriwell, who is the best all-round chap I ever met."

He proceeded to describe the school in detail, and his friend heartily approved of the idea. An hour later Billy was summoned, and, when he appeared, quite unsuspecting of what was in store for him, he received the ultimatum.

At first he protested strenuously, but with absolutely no effect. When John Cromwell made up his mind it took something like a cataclysm of nature to change him. Finding his protests unavailing, Billy grew angry and absolutely refused to go. He was speedily brought to a realizing sense that his father was boss.

Then he sulked, but he might have spared himself the trouble. When James Blancombe started for Chicago, Billy, clad in the uncomfortable and unfamiliar garb of civilization, as conceived by the proprietor of the general store at Benton, accompanied him.

By this time he was resigned to the inevitable, for he was too sensible to make himself uncomfortable by clinging to a grouch when there was nothing to be gained thereby. Nevertheless, he did not view the prospect before him with the least enthusiasm. The thought of being confined in a school, with a lot of hateful teachers to order him around, was far from being in pleasant contrast to the free, untrammeled life he had always led.

"There'll be a lot of fool kids, too," he thought contemptuously, "who don't know how to do a darned thing but study and play silly games. I sure don't see how I'm going to stand it without seeing the boys for so long, or having broncs to break, or anything that's any fun."

His traveling companion, making a shrewd guess as to what the boy's attitude would be, tried diplomatically to prepare him a little for what he would have to expect when he landed in the midst of four hundred odd boys of all ages and temperaments.

It was impossible, however, to convey to a chap, whose horizon was so limited, a conception of what he would be up against. Blancombe, therefore, with the best intentions in the world, only succeeded in strengthening Billy's belief that he, "a man of the world," who had seen life in the rough and lived with real men, was doomed to a long sojourn among a crowd of immature boys.

He gathered one fact, however, which pleased him. Evidently his waking time would not be devoted entirely to study. There were, according to Blancombe, frequent periods of relaxation, during which one might

accomplish many things. The prospect was not unattractive.

"I don't s'pose they ever saw a cow-puncher," he thought. "I'll show 'em the real article. I'll make 'em sit up and take notice. I reckon there'll be some fun in that."

The more he considered, the more the prospect appealed to him.

"I sure will," he murmured softly. "I'll have 'em feeding out of my hand inside a week."

But Billy still had many things to learn.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

Through some mistake of James Blancombe's, they arrived at Bloomfield a day late, and thus missed being one of the crowd of boys returning from the summer vacation, or entering school for the first time.

The train, instead of being crowded to its utmost capacity by a joking, laughing, wriggling mob of youthful humanity, was comparatively empty. So was the station, with its hacks which had been in such demand the day before; so was the winding ribbon of a road circling picturesquely past well-kept farms interspersed with stretches of pasture land and woods.

The boy was languidly interested in these evidences of the rural nature of the neighborhood, but contemptuous, withal, at the cramped, restricted scope of the farms. Compared with those in the West, they were puny indeed. Still, he was glad to find the school located where there was enough space in which to breathe.

His condescension wore a bit thin, however, as the horse emerged from a stretch of pine-bordered road, turned in between two great posts of rough stone, and took the wide, curving driveway at a walk.

There was something about the whole picture spread out before him which made Billy straighten up involuntarily and sweep back the straggling lock of yellow hair that trailed down over his gray eyes.

A great mass of buildings, built of mellowed red

brick, occupied the upper end of a wide plateau. Behind them, forming a setting of dark green, was a stretch of woods; while on the other side, extending for a considerable distance, was a level, grassy expanse at least half a mile long, beyond which a rather abrupt slope led down to the edge of a fair-sized lake.

Though Billy did not realize it, the situation had been chosen with great care, and was an ideal one for its purpose. The open expanse of turf served, in part, as an athletic field. In the middle was the diamond and gridiron. On one side a number of perfect tennis courts had been constructed. The lake was handy for water sports in the summer, or skating and ice hockey in the winter.

Though the boy from Arizona would have denied the accusation indignantly, he felt an odd thrill which he could not understand, as his eyes roamed over the whole panorama and returned swiftly to the buildings, before which a number of figures were strolling about, or sprawling upon the steps.

His ideas as to what Farnham Hall would be like had been vague, but they were certainly nothing like the reality. This was so much bigger than anything he had ever imagined that he felt just a little awed, and it suddenly came to him that other things about the school might be different as well.

The instant he realized the trend of his thoughts, however, he scowled fiercely and assumed an expression of bored indifference. Those boys, now glancing curiously toward the approaching carriage, must never be allowed to imagine that this was not an everyday experience with him.

Nevertheless, as he stepped out a moment or two later and reached for his wicker suit case, he was painfully conscious of that battery of eyes directed upon him, and when he turned and walked toward the steps, it was extremely difficult to do it in the natural, indifferent manner which he had planned.

He realized suddenly that his trousers were much too tight and that his coat was riding up on his neck. The vivid plaid, which he had thought rather fetching, became strident until it almost shrieked aloud. He felt his ears begin to burn, and, before he had stumbled past the group, who did not utter a word, but only looked, his face was flaming with embarrassment and his ire rapidly was mounting to fever heat.

He was angry with himself for having been so easily "fussed" by a lot of immature, inexperienced boys. He was furious at Blancombe for having been the means of his being here instead of on the ranch, where he belonged and where he felt at home. He was also more than provoked that the older man had done nothing to help him preserve his attitude of indifference as he ran that gantlet of curious eyes. If only his companion had engaged him in conversation it would have been vastly easier.

The result was that, by the time he landed in Frank Merriwell's office, he was mad all over and ready to let loose his temper at the slightest provocation. He would show this principal, or whatever he was, that there was one youth, at least, who was not going to be so easy to handle as this crowd of immature Easterners. He would make it plain from the first that he was not in that class at all.

Just how he meant to go about it he did not know. There was, in fact, no time at all in which to plan anything, for Blancombe did not pause in the hall, but made at once for a door on the right. The next moment Billy, his face still somewhat flushed and his expression more sullen than usual, found himself in a large, square, well-lighted room, furnished plainly but thoroughly, and occupied by a young and impressive man.

The latter arose instantly and greeted Blancombe warmly. As Billy watched him and listened to his voice, the rebellious, angry mood began to wear thin. The man was so totally different from anything he had ever fancied, that the boy's interest was at once aroused. A little later, when Merriwell shook hands with him and began to ask a few questions, he found himself talking about his life on the ranch with a freedom from either embarrassment or animosity. This change astonished him as he thought about it later.

His heart warmed toward this man who knew ranch life so well, and who, it appeared, actually owned a big outfit in Wyoming. He felt, somehow, as if he had met a kindred spirit who understood him and could sympathize with his feelings at being brought from the free, boundless life on the open range to the comparatively cramped, confining limits of civilization.

"It will be a little hard at first," Merriwell concluded, "to get used to the change, but I think you soon will come to see that there are advantages quite apart from those of education. A school like this is really a little world in itself, and you come up against most of the difficulties and problems you encounter later in life.

You'll have to make your way by effort and ability—by doing things which will win the liking and respect of those about you—by standing on your own feet, in other words. I don't think you will find the life here uninteresting."

He paused an instant, but Cromwell made no comment.

"You don't agree with me?" Merry went on, reading the boy's face like an open book.

"Not—exactly, sir," Billy stammered. "After the ranch, this will be rather—tame."

A shadowy smile flickered across Frank's expressive countenance. Other boys had come to Farnham Hall with the same idea, and had speedily changed their minds.

"Whatever else you may find it," he said quietly, "I don't think it will be that. Do you play football?"

"No, sir. I've never seen a game."

Merriwell's eyes flitted over the lithe, muscular figure of the boy before him and came to rest on the clean-cut, bronzed face.

"You'll learn," he said incisively. "You ought to make good at it, too. You've just the build for end. But that will all come later. Just now I'll have one of the boys show you your room and introduce you to some of the fellows. You can take to-day to get settled down, and start in with the rest to-morrow."

"Very well, sir," Cromwell answered, with an excess of that bored, slightly indifferent manner which had cropped out every now and then during the conversation.

Merriwell's lips parted as if he meant to say some-

thing, but they closed again almost as quickly. His first impulse had been to give Cromwell a bit of advice regarding his attitude toward the boys he was about to meet. He decided, however, that it would be quite wasted. The youth from Arizona was one of those who have to learn most things by experience, and this was one of them.

The realization that life here was very different from what the Western lad had imagined it; the discovery that he was of vastly little less importance among this crowd of boys than he supposed, might be more or less painful and humiliating, but it would be good discipline.

Therefore Merry kept his peace, but there was an odd expression in his eyes as he bent over and pressed a button on his desk.

When the attendant appeared, a moment or two later, Merry hesitated for a few moments.

"Find Herman Coors, Robert," he said at length, "and ask him to step in here for a moment."

Since the disillusioning process was necessary, it might as well be done thoroughly and well.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

STARTING WRONG.

As the door opened a little later, Billy could not help glancing curiously in that direction. He saw a lithe, lean, tall chap, somewhere near his own age, whose hair and eyes were of almost the same shade of brown, and upon whose tanned face dwelt an expression of guileless innocence which made the fellow from Arizona curl his lips slightly.

"You wished to speak to me, sir?" inquired the newcomer, in a gentle, rather drawling voice.

Merry's face was quite serious, but an odd twinkle lurked in his dark eyes.

"Yes, Coors," he returned briskly; "I want you to know Cromwell, from Arizona, who has just arrived."

The brown-haired chap looked at Billy with widening eyes, and then came slowly forward.

"Glad to meet you," he drawled, extending a somewhat limp hand.

With a feeling of grim pleasure, Billy gripped the unresisting fingers with a vigor which brought a half-stifled exclamation from Coors' lips, and caused him to snatch his hand away with the greatest precipitation, a spasm of pain crossing his face at the same instant.

Merriwell, apparently not noticing the little incident, went on at once:

"I wish you'd show Cromwell to his room, Coors. It's number eight on your corridor. After that you

might take him down and introduce him to some of the boys."

Coors ceased nursing his hand and dropped it to his side.

"Very well, sir," he acquiesced, without any very great enthusiasm.

Taking the key from Frank, he turned toward the door, and then paused a moment while Billy picked up his bag and followed him. A moment later they were out in the hall, with the office door closed behind them.

"Say!" exclaimed Coors, regarding his companion with some displeasure. "Do you always shake hands like that?"

"Like what?" Billy inquired innocently.

"The way you did with me."

"Why, what was the matter with it?" Cromwell asked, elevating his eyebrows in surprise.

"Oh, nothing," Coors retorted, in a slightly injured tone. "Only you came near breaking the bones in my fingers."

Billy smiled wickedly.

"Didn't know you were so soft," he returned, in a sarcastic tone.

"I'm not!" Coors rejoined indignantly. "Even if you do have a lot of muscle, it don't follow you've got to use it all every time you shake hands."

"All!" exclaimed Cromwell. "If you think that's all the muscle I've got, you're sure away off."

Somewhat mollified by the look of awe on his companion's face, he went on in a slightly patronizing tone:

"Why, out in Arizona we don't think anything of

handling a steer on the peck without any help at all, and that sure takes some strength, I tell you."

Coors' eyes widened alarmingly.

"What's on the peck?" he asked, in a puzzled tone.

"Mad—crazy mad," Cromwell explained patronizingly. "They run amuck sometimes and try to gore anybody or anything they see."

"Gee!" exclaimed Coors. "And you tackle them all by yourself?"

"Sure. Throw 'em with a rope and tie 'em fast."

"Whew!" Coors whistled. "I wouldn't like that for a cent. Don't they ever get loose and gore you?"

Billy shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, sure," he answered airily. "You have to run the risk, though. I once saw a man killed that way, but, then, he wasn't much more than a tenderfoot."

By this time they had reached the room, and Coors gave a slight shudder as he unlocked the door and threw it open. He was evidently greatly impressed by his companion's nonchalance, and the indifferent manner in which he spoke of having witnessed the goring to death of a human being.

"My gracious!" he exclaimed, as they stepped inside the door. "I suppose you've seen lots of desperate things done. Do you live on a ranch?"

"Sure—biggest one in Arizona—two hundred thousand head of steers on the range of over a million acres."

Coors gasped.

"A million acres!" he repeated incredulously. "Are you trying to string me?"

"Not a bit," assured Cromwell, pleased by the other's astonishment. "It covers over half of a county."

Apparently almost stunned with amazement, Coors dropped into a chair and cogitated for a moment in silence.

"And horses?" he questioned dazedly.

"Thousands of 'em," was the nonchalant reply.

"You—didn't ever break one of those—er—wild bronchos, did you?" queried the brown-haired chap.

Billy laughed.

"Hundreds of 'em," he retorted. "Why, that's my specialty at the ranch, kiddo. The boys used to call me Broncho Bill, you know."

"Gee!" came in awe-struck tones. "Think of that! Broncho Bill! What a corking name!"

Billy was now thoroughly enjoying himself. The wondering admiration of this fellow was as incense to his nostrils, and was but a forerunner of the attitude the whole school would probably adopt toward him. He was not given to boasting, but he had not been able to resist the gasping astonishment of this extremely verdant tenderfoot, and had even gone to the length of embroidering a tasteful little pattern on the solid ground of truth.

"Oh, that's nothing," he said, taking his seat on the edge of the table and swinging one foot carelessly. "All the boys have names like that. Sometimes they call me Billy, the Kid, after the famous outlaw who shot up so many men, you know."

"Gracious!" burst from Coors, in a tone of excitement. "You don't mean to say that there was any—that you ever——"

"Oh, of course I never did anything like that," the boy from Arizona put in, his accent intimating as plainly as could be that he was, nevertheless, still a pretty bad nut.

Coors bent forward, both hands grasping the chair arms, his eyes open to their widest extent.

"Billy," he almost whispered, "you didn't—ever—shoot a man, did you?"

His tone was that of one hoping against hope, and Billy could not resist it. He glanced out of the window, his face set in lines of sorrowful regret for the misdeeds of which he had never been guilty.

"Twice," he murmured. "Of course," he went on, spurred by a gurgle from Coors, "one of 'em was an outlaw and would have killed me if I hadn't drawn first. The other—— Well, it was my devilish temper. I see red when I'm riled, you know, and this man got up against me at his own risk. Still, I don't like to think of him as he lay there—his face——"

He broke off with a very realistic shudder and glanced about the room as if in an attempt to get away from the unpleasant memories aroused by this effective, but wholly fictitious, child of his fertile brain.

"Not a bad room," he commented condescendingly. "I reckon I'll be fairly comfortable here. Of course I'm used to roughing it, though."

In reality the room was far better than any he had ever had, but it would never do to allow that fact to be suspected.

Coors was not interested in the matter, however. He was impatient to get downstairs again and intro-

duce to his particular friends this unusual and thrilling addition to the school.

"Don't stop now to unpack your bag," he urged. "Come on down and meet the fellows. They'll be crazy to see you and hear about some of the things you've been through."

So Cromwell, after holding back a little for the sake of effect, presently gave in and accompanied his new acquaintance downstairs. His spirits had increased wonderfully, and he no longer regarded the school experience as an unmitigated bore. He would have the time of his life stuffing these innocents full of all sorts of stories. Already he saw himself the center of an interested group, each member of which hanging on his words and listening to his experiences with awed amazement, evincing in their every gesture and expression the intense respect they held for this boy, whose life had been crowded full of such varied and blood-stirring perils.

He had no fear of his stock of stories failing him. The cow-punchers on the ranch, in years gone by, had stuffed him exactly as he purposed stuffing his new and more innocent companions. He had only to repeat these interesting tales, with or without adornment, and, when in doubt, he had a vivid imagination.

He almost laughed aloud as he considered the alluring prospect. Why, it was like taking candy from an infant in arms! He would own the school in less than forty-eight hours.

As has been remarked, Billy had much to learn. His first lesson was fast approaching, however.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE FIRST LESSON.

As the two boys emerged upon the stone terrace which ran along the front of the building, Billy saw that there were only eight or ten fellows left of the much larger number which had been there when he drove up a little while before.

Had he carried his observation farther, instead of allowing his mind to dwell upon the impression he was going to make, he might have noticed the air of eager expectation pervading the group. This was apparent in the swift turning of each head as the sound of footsteps resounded on the flagging.

The eyes bent upon him were not filled altogether with curiosity, either, though Billy saw only that. There was a faint undercurrent of suppressed mirth, stronger in some than in others, according to their measure of self-control.

"Fellows," said Coors, breaking the silence, "we little knew what was in store for us when that carriage drove up this morning. This is William Cromwell, alias Billy, the Kid, alias Broncho Bill, formally a cow-puncher on his father's ranch in Arizona."

Billy was no fool, and, at this decidedly unexpected manner of introduction, he turned swiftly and shot a glance of suspicion at Coors. The latter's face, however, was so innocent and guileless, so evidently earnest and sincere, that the Westerner decided he must have

been wrong, and he fixed his gaze again upon the group, having thus missed a sudden convulsion on the part of one boy, which was as swiftly squelched by a sharp, admonitory prod from the elbow of another.

Each face was now grave and serious, with a more or less gratifying expression of awed amazement

"A cow-puncher?" exclaimed one.

"Gee! What do you know about that?"

"Billy, the Kid!" cried another. "Why, he was a desperate outlaw. You don't mean to say, Herm, that Cromwell——"

"I say nothing," Coors broke in, with significant emphasis. "I only know that's what they called him. Cowboys have a way, I believe, of hitting the nail on the head."

A simultaneous gasp arose from the astonished group.

"Whew!" exclaimed Don Shasta, thin, wiry, and black-haired. "That's going some. Say, Bill, you never really shot anybody, did you?"

Cromwell hesitated an instant, a curious feeling of shame coming over him. For the first time he realized that he was telling an out-and-out lie. Before, it had seemed rather a good joke to stuff the innocent appearing Coors full of nonsense, but to stand up before a crowd and repeat it all, was rather different. Still, having committed himself, he could not very well back water without making himself a laughingstock, so he resolved to brazen it out.

"I had to shoot an outlaw once," he replied shortly.

"But the other," Coors urged eagerly. "Tell 'em about the time you saw red."

Billy felt his face growing decidedly florid, and his eyes sought the ground.

"I'd rather not talk about that," he began. "It isn't——"

He broke off abruptly and threw back his head in a startled way. The pent-up emotions of Jack Ranleigh had found vent in a shriek of hysterical laughter which was like a spark of gunpowder. Instantly a roar of delight arose from the group, mingled with a Gatling fire of joshing exclamations:

"Oh, you Broncho Bill!"

"You Billy, the Kid!"

"He saw red and shot a man!"

"And now he don't like to talk about it!"

"Ain't he the bold, ba-ad boy!"

"Does he carry a gun?"

"Sure he does."

"Search him and see."

"I'm sca't to."

"What of?"

"He might see red and shoot me up."

With scarlet face and drooping jaw, Billy stared at the joyous, grinning, transformed faces of the fellows before him. For a second he did not understand, for it had all come about so suddenly. Then, with the blood tingling in his very finger tips, he realized that they were making game of him. The whole thing had been a put-up job from the very first.

He whirled furiously on Coors, only to be met with an even broader grin than showed on any of the other faces. The wide, generous mouth was parted over two rows of perfect teeth, and the brown eyes were

almost invisible as the fellow fairly shook with the intensity of his mirth.

As Coors met Cromwell's baleful glare he choked convulsively.

"Look out how he shakes hands with you, fellows," Coors gasped. "He's got a grip like iron that'll break every bone in your hands. He goes out every morning before breakfast and ties up a ramping, roaring steer for exercise, all by his little self. His specialty is the breaking of those wild, fiery, untamed horses of the plains, known in the vernacular as broncs. He's subdued thousands by the power of his awful eye alone. When he fastens that orb upon them, they crumple before him, their spirit is gone, they roll over at his command and speak cutely when he so desires. He's the only, original, red-eyed cowboy from the great and woolly——"

Cromwell waited to hear no more. His first impulse had been to fling himself upon the taunting wretch and fight it out then and there. A swift second thought, however, told him that he would never stand a show against the whole bunch, who would undoubtedly come to the rescue of one of their number. He would have to wait until he got his tormentor alone before he administered the well-deserved punishment.

Flight was the only other way whereby he could escape the lash of that mocking, laughing voice; so he turned, and, dashing past Coors, flung himself against the door and disappeared within.

For a second he halted inside to get his breath and

compose his features, and, as he stood there, he heard one of the crowd outside gasp in a strangled voice:

"Ever run up against anything like that in Colorado, Hermie?"

"Can't say I have," laughed Coors, "and we've had a great line of punchers in the outfit, too."

Billy gave a start and hastened on through the hall. Colorado! Outfit! Was it possible that——

Suddenly he darted forward and caught a passing boy by the arm.

"You know Herman Coors?" he demanded without preamble.

The astonished youngster wriggled out of his grasp and skipped off a few feet.

"Sure," he retorted. "Say, what's biting you, anyhow? You act like you were bughouse."

"Where's he come from?" Cromwell asked shortly. "Where's his home?"

"On a ranch in Colorado," retorted the boy with equal brevity. "What's up?"

Billy made no answer, but strode away, his face frowning and the color slowly rising again. He had been fooled and made game of. Coors had deliberately led him on by pretending ignorance of anything Western, whereas he was really a Western boy himself, and very likely knew as much about ranch life as Billy did.

"It's a dirty trick!" the latter burst out furiously when he had gained his room. "He did it all on purpose, and if I don't pay up the low-down coyote good and proper for it, I'm a liar! I'll show him it isn't healthy to play tricks on Bill Cromwell."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE PROGRESS OF BILLY.

Billy Cromwell lay in the shade of a tree to one side of the football field and scowled. In the one short week since his entrance to Farnham Hall his whole scheme of life had been upset and turned topsy-turvy.

The feeling of patronizing superiority with which he had at first looked down upon his inexperienced, immature companions had lasted a scant twenty-four hours. At the end of that time he had been forced to the realization that, while they might be inexperienced regarding a few details of ranch life, they were very wise about everything else under the sun.

Looking back upon that revolutionary week, he found himself wondering at his belief that he could string them with faked-up stories of his life in the West. Never for an instant had one of them been fooled. Instead, they had deftly turned the tables and got the laugh on him a dozen times a day.

Not since that first humiliating experience had Billy let fall a word of his Western experiences, either real or fictional. The lesson had been a bitter one, but it was effectual. His lips were forever sealed on that subject, but there seemed to be innumerable other ways in which his companions, adept as they were by long practice, could work up schemes to fool him.

Time and time again, after he had bitten like a sucker, he vowed that he would never believe a thing

anybody told him. Sometimes not an hour would elapse before he was taken in by an open, candid face and an innocent, sincere manner.

During the first few days he had come to hate it all intensely, and he would have given anything to be able to leave the school at once. He would have done so without waiting for permission from his father but for the pride which kept him from acknowledging defeat. He determined to stick it out in spite of everything, and show these dubs that he could beat them at their own game as soon as he learned the rules.

Latterly, another motive had come to bolster up the first one. In spite of the joshing and teasing and constant verbal clashes, he was conscious of a growing liking for the school. Though he did not acknowledge it in so many words, he was becoming fond of the place and interested in the life there.

With the constant clashing of wits, the necessity for being always on the alert, the games, the sports, the many varied interests, he realized that Frank Merriwell was right when he said, that first day, that existence at Farnham Hall never would be tame.

Billy had come to like many of the fellows, too, even though they did josh him all they could. He was sensible enough to realize that he had, in a measure, brought it on himself. He could not very well stand out against everybody, and so he took his medicine in a good-natured manner, hitting back whenever he could and coming to enjoy the sport to a greater or less extent.

His animosity seemed to have centered entirely on Herman Coors, whom he considered responsible for

that first humiliation. He hated the brown-haired chap intensely, and much of his spare time was spent in thinking out ways of getting even.

It proved to be a more difficult proposition than it had seemed at first. There had been no opportunity for starting a fight, for, though Coors was not backward about joshing him, Billy felt that he would be only making a fool of himself if he lost his temper and treated the matter seriously. Moreover, having watched his enemy boxing in the gym, he began to have grave doubts as to his coming out ahead in an encounter.

As yet he had not hit upon another way. If he could only get Coors out on the ranch, it would be a simple matter to triumph over him in shooting, roping, or any other cow-puncher accomplishment. Unfortunately that was impossible, and Billy was decidedly deficient in the games and pastimes in vogue at the school.

Tennis he watched in scornful bewilderment. It seemed kiddish beyond words to spend so much effort in sending a silly little ball into certain marked-off spaces on either side of a net. He could not understand how fellows could play it by the hour with every evidence of interest, while others watched the foolish batting back and forth with attention which verged sometimes on actual excitement.

He cared little more for land hockey, a game often indulged in on the gridiron after the football practice was at an end, and in which half the school sometimes took part. It was a shade better than tennis, perhaps, but that was all.

Football, however, was a different proposition. In the beginning he had watched it, languidly uninterested. The preliminary practice bored him. He could not see anything entertaining in that constant reiteration of the same move. It seemed so absurd for a dozen fellows to just pass the ball from one to the other for half hours at a time, or for others, gathered in little groups of four or six, to wear themselves out making short plunges forward, only to stop, return, and do it all over again.

He did not, in short, understand the game at all, nor see that all this work was necessary before the team could be even selected, much less play a real game.

Only the day before, however, two teams had been picked out and a short game played, at the sight of which Billy sat up and began to take notice. He watched with intense interest the progress of the ball down the field. His eyes sparkled as he beheld the success of certain strategies. His face flushed, and the blood tingled in his finger tips at the clash of man meeting man, the thud of strenuous contact, the shrill voice of the quarter back calling out signals the meaning of which he could not grasp.

This was a man's game, he decided, after it was all over and the tired fellows trooping back to the house for a shower and rubdown. It was the sort of thing he would like to play himself; and that evening, during the hourly study period after supper, he lost himself in dreams of what he might accomplish if he could only learn football and be given a chance on the field.

He was out early the next afternoon, but made no attempt to approach the fellow who was acting as cap-

tain, with a request that he be allowed a trial. He was too wary for that. Experience lately had taught him not to plunge headlong into anything before he had thought it out to the last detail.

He was absolutely inexperienced in the game, and the chances were that he would be turned down and laughed to scorn, especially since Ogden Marshall, acting captain, had been one of the foremost in pestering him.

He did not understand that the right sort of fellow at the head of any branch of athletics never allows personal feeling to interfere with his judgment. He must be always on the alert for good material, and should never turn down any boy, even though he may know nothing of the game, who shows strength and grit and a desire to make good.

So Billy took his place under a tree, determined to watch through another afternoon's practice before he made up his mind. To-day the work started off with a brisk half hour of real playing, in the midst of which Cromwell suddenly gave an exclamation of delight.

Herman Coors played on one of the teams, and Bill had just seen him tackled with a precision and force which brought him crashing to the ground in no gentle manner.

The sight settled his mind once and for all. What one fellow could do, he himself could likewise accomplish. Here, at last, was the thing he had been wishing for. If he could only get into the game, he would have countless chances for going for his enemy in a perfectly legitimate manner.

When he learned how, he could tackle Coors, just

as that boy had tackled him a moment before, only a good bit harder. He could lay for him at every opportunity, break up his plays, and do his best to make his life miserable.

The next moment he was on his feet making rapidly for the center of the field.

CHAPTER XL

ON THE SCRUB.

Waiting until the turmoil of the next down had subsided, the chap from Arizona walked up to Marshall and touched him on the arm. The captain turned abruptly on him, breathing hard and wiping the perspiration from his face.

"Well?" he snapped, in no gentle tones.

"I want to know if you'll give me a chance to go in," Cromwell said sturdily.

Marshall glared at him fiercely.

"Are you nutty?" he demanded. "Do you think I'm going to hold up the game to listen to such rot? Get off the field and do it quick!"

Billy's face flamed, and he clenched both fists. Then he realized in time that he had no right to be angry at the fellow's tone. He should have known better than to butt in during the progress of the game. He would never have done it had he not been spurred on by the idea of getting even with Coors.

Without a word, he turned and walked toward the side lines, and thus missed seeing Coors catch Marshall by the sleeve and whisper a few words into his ear. The next instant, however, he heard the captain's voice bellowing after him:

"Hey, you, Broncho! I'll talk to you after the game's over."

Billy stopped, whirled around, and then, with a sigh

of relief, he resumed his progress toward the side line, thankful for whatever had induced Marshall to change his mind.

For the next half hour he waited patiently, speculating the while as to what his chances would be. When the game finally came to an end and the fellows scattered over the field for individual practice, he made no attempt to move until Marshall waved an arm and shouted again the name for which he himself was responsible, but which he disliked so much, because it reminded him constantly of that humiliating morning.

As he approached on the run, he was conscious of Marshall's speculative scrutiny, and even after he came to a stop before the captain, the latter continued to look him over in silence.

"You want to try for the team, do you?" he asked at length.

"Yes."

"Humph!" commented Marshall. "Why didn't you come out with the others?"

"I—I didn't think about it then," Billy explained slowly.

"Why not?"

"Well, I've—never played before."

The captain's eyebrows went up.

"Oh! Never played, eh?"

"No."

There was a momentary silence.

"What do you weigh?" was the next query, in a rather impatient tone.

"About one hundred and fifty-five."

"Stripped?"

Billy nodded, and Marshall looked more interested.

"Not so bad," he commented. "You're pretty good on your pins, aren't you?"

"I don't get winded easily."

The captain stepped forward and felt Billy's muscle.

"Hard as nails," he murmured. "Can you stand a lot of knocking about?"

"Sure."

"Just as well, because that's about all you'll get," Marshall grinned. "I may as well tell you right now that there isn't much chance of your making the regular team. I've got enough fellows who have played the game and know it from A to Z. I'm willing to try you out on the scrub, though, and, of course, there's always a bare chance that a chap will make good and get a boost. That suit you?"

"I'll be playing against the regular team, then, won't I?" Cromwell asked.

"Part of the time—yes."

"Then I'll do it," Billy returned decidedly. "When do you want me to come out?"

"To-morrow afternoon at three sharp. You haven't any suit, I suppose?"

"No, but I can buy one, can't I?"

"Yes. Mr. Merriwell keeps a supply of athletic stuff on hand. Go to him after practice and he'll fit you out. Don't forget—three to-morrow."

"I won't."

Billy left the field rather pleased with himself. He would almost rather be on the scrub than the regular team, for he would be constantly up against Herman Coors, and it would be strange if he didn't manage

to get in a few knocks now and then at the fellow he hated.

Having fitted himself out, he dressed early, with some assistance from one of the boys, and appeared on the field in the full glory of his unaccustomed raiment, which contrasted vividly with the torn, stained, battle-scared attire of most of his companions.

As these appeared, they greeted him with various jests and witticisms.

"Look at Broncho, fellows."

"Ain't he the spotless young lily."

"He won't be that long. Wait till we get after him."

"Oh, you Billy, the Kid!"

"Look out for yourself, Hermie. I've got a hunch he's after your place."

Coors smiled his wide smile and announced that anybody was welcome to his job that could get it; and a moment later the practice commenced.

Billy took no part in the line-up that day, nor the next. He was turned over to Jim Phillips, one of the best players on the team, to receive instructions in the rudiments of the game, and in a very short time he quite understood the purpose of that tiresome preliminary work which he had looked upon with such scorn.

Phillips, a little provoked at having been singled out to instruct this greenhorn, did not spare him. In showing him the proper way to tackle, he brought Billy to the ground every time with almost unnecessary violence, and when Cromwell himself tried to get that apparently simple, but really difficult, knack, he

found himself dragged about and treated like a bag of sawdust instead of flesh and bone.

Not only that, but whenever he failed—as he did every time for a seeming eternity—his instructor berated him with sharp, stinging sarcasm which hurt almost more than the bruises and scratches which were rapidly accumulating on his person.

But Billy was game and never complained once, nor expressed a desire to stop. There was a bulldog tenacity in his make-up, which made him stick at a thing he had set out to accomplish as long as there was a breath left in his body. Often he felt despairingly that he would never learn. It seemed as if each effort was worse than the last. But still he stuck at it until his head was reeling and he could scarcely keep his feet.

His dogged obstinacy at length impressed Phillips and made him realize that he had been too hard on the youngster.

"There," he said gruffly, as they both arose slowly from the ground after a fairly good tackle, "that'll do for a bit. We'll try a little passing."

Billy passed one sleeve across his dripping face, his body swaying slightly.

"I don't want to stop," he gritted. "I want to keep on till I've got the darned thing."

Phillips looked at him with a new interest.

"You don't expect to learn football in one day, do you?" he asked, half jokingly.

Billy hesitated, struck by this aspect of the case.

"N-o," he returned slowly. "But I'd like to keep on till I do a little better than I did at first."

"And be laid up for a couple of days," supplemented Phillips grimly. "No, we'll try passing for a bit. If it's any satisfaction to you, why, you are better at tackling than when you started. You've got the general idea, and all you want is a lot of practice."

Somewhat comforted, Billy took his place at a little distance and made ready to catch the elusive pigskin. At this branch of the art he surprised his instructor by showing unusual ability. At first he was naturally awkward, but he caught on at once, and before they finished the afternoon's work, he had developed amazingly, both in catching the ball cleanly and throwing it with surprising accuracy.

"Seems to do it instinctively," Phillips remarked later to Marshall. "He's better at it now than some of the fellows will ever be."

"Humph!" grunted the captain reflectively. "He's speedy, too. I wonder how he'll size up as end."

Phillips shook his head dubiously, though he admitted that the chap might do at a pinch on the scrub, and the matter was dropped for a day or two, during which Cromwell continued zealously at his work.

He improved in his tackling, and mastered the knack of throwing himself on the ball, until he could pass muster at them both. The fact remained, however, that his strong points were an exceptional accuracy in passing and receiving the ball, and speed. He could get away at the beginning of a play with the quickness of a cat, and, once started for the goal with a clear field before him, it took a fellow of much more than the usual ability as a runner to come anywhere near him.

His knowledge of the finer points of the game, however, was hazy, to say the least; and when, a few days later, one of the boys playing end on the scrub strained an ankle, there was a good deal of amused surprise among the rest when Marshall brusquely ordered Cromwell to take the place.

Billy was overjoyed. At last the moment had come for which he had been longing. It was rather annoying, to be sure, to find that Coors, playing at left half, was nowhere near him in the opposite line, but he consoled himself with the thought that his chance would come sooner or later.

Meanwhile, he would show these dubs—the reason for whose smiles had been perfectly apparent to him—that he was able to turn a trick himself now and then. If he only got a chance, he'd show them that he could do a little something at the game, if he was a greenhorn.

Unfortunately the opportunity did not materialize. Evidently Jack Ranleigh, the scrub quarter, did not share Billy's belief in his ability; for he consistently neglected to give his new left end a chance to do more than the ordinary routine of interference and assistance.

Chafing under this restraint, when his whole being was eager for the performance of some spectacular feat, Billy disconsolately watched the sun sinking lower and lower as the end of the day approached. It was mean in Ranleigh not to give him one chance to show what he could do. "Scrag" Horton probably would be out again to-morrow and shove him out of the cov-

eted place, to await the disabling of some other boy before he could get back again.

"If I could only have a show," he thought rebelliously to himself, "I'd show 'em a thing or two."

Then the signal came and he saw the much-desired pigskin coming his way.

For an instant he thought he must have misunderstood the signal, and that the ball was meant for him. A second later he saw it plump into the waiting arms of the tackle next to him, who plunged with it into the line.

The momentary hesitation kept Billy somewhat on the outskirts of the mêlée of bodies which piled up an instant later, but he tripped over some one's feet and crashed down with a force which made him a little dizzy.

As he lay there, trying weakly to roll out and get on his feet, he saw something which sent every other idea from his mind and cleared his brain like lightning.

Not a dozen feet away, just coming to rest after the impetus which had sent it out of that vortex of arms and legs, was the ball!

With a squirm and a wriggle, Billy released himself and was on his feet. Another instant and he had scooped up the pigskin and was streaking toward the distant goal.

His chance had come at last, and he had seized it instantly. As he flew along, he heard the thud of pursuing feet and risked a glance backward. It was Herman Coors, the fellow he hated. Gritting his teeth, he

redoubled his efforts, resolved to outdistance his pursuer or perish in the attempt.

His ears were deaf to the shouts and clamor back of him. He thought only of the goal in front and of the necessity for beating his enemy. The white lines slipped under his feet one by one, and the goal posts loomed nearer and nearer.

From behind the thud of feet continued, but did not seem to gain. Panting from the effort, weary, but triumphant, Billy flung himself forward the last few feet and dropped joyfully on the ball.

As he did so a concerted roar of laughter rose from the crowd behind, and brought Billy to his feet like a shot. He stared at Coors, standing a little way off, too overcome to speak. He glanced about him, and then, of a sudden, realized the horrible truth.

Mixed up in some manner by the suddenness of it, and probably, also, by the crack on his head, he had mistaken the goals and scored a safety for the regular team.

CHAPTER XLI.

MISTAKEN JUDGMENT.

What followed had better rest in oblivion. Shamed, humiliated, his slight cockiness vanishing like a pricked balloon, Billy stood before the captain with bowed head and listened in meek silence to his roaring reprimand.

He learned that a football player must keep his head, first, last, and always. That a man who amounted to anything on the gridiron could be knocked senseless and tell, on the moment of recovering consciousness, not only where his own goal lay, but the exact status of the game at the time he went under. Such a wild, kiddish, utterly impossible trick of a fellow running over his own goal line had never been even imagined at Farnham Hall.

All this, and a great deal more, Billy heard in silence and with a sinking heart. He felt that after such a dumb exhibition, his chances for ever playing on that field again were utterly ruined; and a little later, as he limped slowly back to the school, he could almost have shed tears at what he had done.

Nothing was said to him about coming out for practice next day, but at three o'clock he was on hand, standing a little to one side and wistfully watching a group consisting of most of the members of the regular team, who seemed to be discussing himself, if he could judge by the occasional glances cast in his direction.

"Deciding whether I'll have another chance, I suppose," he said to himself, as he shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. "Gee! I sure hope they give it to me. Horton's gone to the infirmary and may not be out for a week. I'll never have another chance like this—never!"

Anxiously he watched the faces, trying to get some idea of how things were going. Herman Coors seemed to be doing most of the talking, and, as he realized this, Billy's heart sank.

"Might as well give up hoping," he thought bitterly. "He'll do his best to keep me out."

He would have been more than amazed had he been near enough to hear the discussion.

His surmise that the fellows were discussing the advisability of giving him another trial was quite correct. When the news came that Horton's ankle was in a more serious condition than had been supposed, Marshall frowned angrily and bit his lips.

"Thunder!" he exclaimed. "That puts us in bad. I can't think of any one to fill his place."

Coors, who was standing near by, ceased passing a ball to Phillips and walked over.

"Why don't you let Broncho stay?" he inquired.

"What! After yesterday?" demanded the captain incredulously. "Why, he'll never learn football in a thousand years."

A chorus of agreement, mingled a bit with laughter at the recollection of yesterday's doings, arose from the players within earshot.

Coors smiled a little.

"That was pretty bad," he admitted. "All the same, I wouldn't condemn the kid for that one slip-up."

"It's a slip-up which shows only too well how utterly irresponsible he is," Marshall retorted forcibly. "A fellow that'll do such a fool thing as that is apt to do anything."

"Gee—yes!" exclaimed Shasta. "What if he pulled off a stunt like that in a game?"

"Whew!" whistled Phillips. "He might pork the whole thing."

"Yes," echoed another; "he could lose the game easy as rolling off a log."

Coors was still smiling that wide, pleasant smile of his.

"I didn't know we were discussing him as a candidate for the regular team," he commented quietly.

"Same principle," returned Marshall impatiently. "There's no telling which one of the scrub may be called on to substitute, and it's a waste of time training a chap who can't possibly make good."

"I should say he'd done pretty well considering the short time he's had to learn," Coors remarked.

"When has he?" demanded the captain. "He certainly didn't show up very brilliantly yesterday, quite apart from that crazy exhibition at the end."

"So far as I could see, he had very little chance to do anything," Coors replied. "I was thinking more of the showing he made while Phillips was training him. Besides, you'll all admit that he's mighty swift on his pins."

"Oh, yes, he's that, all right," Marshall admitted. "But mere speed don't make a player."

"It's a blamed good quality, though," Coors smiled. "Besides, I understand he's clever at passing and receiving the ball. Isn't that so, Jim?"

He turned questioningly to Phillips, who nodded slowly.

"Yes, he's all right there," he admitted.

"Adding that to his quickness," Coors resumed, glancing back at Marshall, "he ought to do mighty well on the forward pass, and I really think he's got the making of a good player in him. He's hard as nails and full of grit, and I don't believe you'd ever see him repeat yesterday's performance, or anything like it again."

Marshall frowned a bit, and then his face suddenly cleared.

"Say, Hermie," he bantered, "what the mischief are you blowing his horn so for? He hates you like poison."

Coors hesitated, a slight flush tingeing his brown face.

"That may be," he retorted, "but I don't like to see a chap lose his chance to make good whether he—I like him or not. Besides, if he turns out as I think he will, we may be mighty glad to have him to fall back on some day."

Marshall chuckled.

"Well, let it go at that," he said. "We've wasted time enough on it now. I'll give him another chance on your account, Herm; but if he falls down again it'll be the end."

"Sure!" the brown-eyed chap agreed. "That's your

business. Only you needn't tell that to him. I don't want him to think he owes anything to me."

"Trust me," laughed Marshall.

Turning, he waved an imperative summons to the anxious boy, and bellowed:

"Stir your stumps, Broncho! What in time are you waiting there for?"

With a smothered exclamation of joy and relief, Billy raced out into the field.

"He's giving me another chance," he gasped delightedly. "Gee, what luck! If I don't make good this time, I'll deserve to be thrown out."

Nearing the group, his eyes happened to catch Coors' glance, and a glow of triumph came over him.

"Couldn't work it to keep me out, could you?" he exulted inwardly. "It's your last chance, old sport, for I'll sure never give you another one."

Which shows how little we can sometimes judge the motives and desires of others, and how easy it is to color them with reflections from our own beliefs.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE PRINCIPLE OF FOOTBALL.

Billy's progress as a member of the scrub presently was cut short by the unexpected return of Horton from the infirmary, and the Arizona boy was obliged to drop out of the position in which he had planned to do such great things, without having had a single chance of getting up against Herman Coors.

At first he was so disappointed and discouraged that he let things slide and grew careless. He was roused from this attitude of indifference by Jim Phillips.

"Look here, Broncho," the latter said severely one afternoon, "you've got to take a brace and do it quick, or you may as well beat it off the field for good."

Billy flushed slightly at the other's tone.

"What's the use?" he grumbled. "I might keep on with these practice stunts all season and never get another chance to do a thing."

Phillips snorted disgustedly.

"You fool!" he exclaimed. "I thought you had more sense. Don't you see that the only way you're likely to get a chance is by working like the mischief every minute of the time? Can't you understand that the more practice you get the more likely Marshall will be to put you on the scrub in place of some one who isn't as good as you are? You make me good and tired talking such rot as that."

Billy's face was a deep crimson by this time, and

there was an expression of almost incredulous interest in the gray eyes which were fixed intently on his companion.

"You don't mean that I've got a chance of getting on the scrub unless somebody's hurt or sick, do you?" he gasped.

Phillips sighed wearily.

"You give me a pain," he retorted. "Did you think that Strawbridge, and Minturn, and I have been coaching you for the past week just because we wanted the pleasure of your company?"

Billy grinned sheepishly.

"My head isn't that swelled," he expostulated. "But I——"

"Then for Heaven's sake, wake up!" admonished Phillips severely. "Stir your stumps and do something. You've got the making of a good player in you, but you'll never get there if you don't cut out all this tommyrot about it not being worth while exerting yourself just because you're not on the scrub."

He said a good deal more to the same purpose and in language which made Cromwell wince a bit. There was no trouble after that from any lack of enthusiasm in his work, however. He went at it in a whole-souled manner, which produced such good results that he was put on the scrub less than a week later in a permanent position, from which there was no danger of being ousted so long as he kept up his present state of excellence.

This time he was at right end, and much nearer Herman Coors than he had been before. Inwardly he exulted at this opportunity to get in a blow at his

enemy, and he at once proceeded to make ready for the inevitable clash.

It did not come until well toward the end of the afternoon, for Marshall was trying out some plays in which the left half did not carry the ball. Just before dusk, however, the opportunity came—that is, Billy thought it had come. The ball was passed to Coors, who started with it for a plunge through the line.

As Billy saw the fellow he hated coming straight toward him, his heart leaped exultingly, and with a lunge he dove forward to meet him. So occupied was he in the necessity for bringing Coors to earth that he quite missed the fact that the play was a double pass and that the half back had transferred the ball to full back.

Breaking through the line, he made a fine tackle and slammed Coors to the ground with gratifying violence. Not content with that, he jolted down on the body of the under man with a force which nearly knocked Coors breathless, and, though the fellow with the ball had already been downed, he continued to sit triumphantly astride his enemy with no room for any thought in his brain save the delight of having at last come out ahead.

So happy was he at what he had done that he did not hear Marshall yelling at him impatiently to stop his nonsense and line up again. A moment later, however, he was gripped by the collar and jerked to his feet with no gentle hand, and spun around to face the frowning, angry captain.

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Marshall.

Billy's jaw dropped at the other's scathing tone.

"Why, I—I—tackled him," he stammered.

"What for?"

"He—he had the—ball."

"Oh, did he?" sneered Marshall. "I don't see it."

Cromwell stared helplessly around. Most of the team were standing at a little distance off, and a moment later he saw the ball plainly, lying on the ground where Winslow had been downed. The color flamed into his face, and he dropped his gaze.

"I thought——" he stammered, and then was silent.

"You thought, did you?" thundered Marshall. "That's the whole trouble with you, you don't think. You don't use your head. It's almost as crazy an exhibition as you gave us last week running over your own goal line. If you hadn't been so crazy to sail into Coors you'd have seen him pass the ball to Winslow. There's one thing you've got to get wise to, and do it quick, or you won't last a minute on the scrub. You're here to play football and nothing else. This is not the place for working off any private, personal grudges. When you come out on the field you've got to forget everything but the game. Nothing else matters. If you're going to waste time thinking of how to get even with some man on your own team, instead of keeping your mind on the plays, the sooner I know it the better, so I can fill your place with some one who has the right idea. Do you get that? Understand just what I mean?"

Head down and hands clenched tightly at his sides, Billy listened to the cutting, biting words, his cheeks flaming. He had never been so shamed and humiliated

in his life. The incidents of that first day were as nothing to this. But he was sensible enough to realize that he had only himself to blame. He deserved every word that Marshall had said to him, and more.

"Well?" snapped the captain impatiently.

"Yes, I understand," Billy faltered.

"And you're going to cut out this kiddish nonsense?"

"I'll try."

"Try!" exclaimed Marshall. "You've got to do more than try. Understand, this is your last chance. If you don't toe the mark and play the game as it should be played, out you go. Get that?"

With an effort, Billy threw back his head and looked the captain in the eyes.

"I'll do it," he said more firmly. "I won't give you a chance to call me down again."

"Humph!" grunted Marshall. "See that you don't. Line up, boys. We've wasted too much time as it is."

Billy hustled to his place in the line, his face still crimson, but he had resolved that never again would he give any one a chance to pitch into him like that.

Though it had seemed hard, it was only the lesson which every boy must learn before he can succeed at any game. The submergence of self must be absolute. Every like and dislike, every personal hope or fear, must be thrust aside. He must learn to plunge into the line without a thought of personal injury or unpleasantness. What happens to him is of slight importance to any one but himself. His little strains and bruises count for nothing compared with the general progress of the game.

On the other hand, once he has conquered that in-

nate fear—that impulse to hesitate before plunging into the mêlée of stalwart, powerful forms—he must learn the danger of recklessness. He must understand the necessity of keeping his head every minute of the time, and come to see how impossible it is really to play the game unless his brain is behind every move he makes.

To an outsider, perhaps, football may have the appearance of being a game of brute force, but those who play it realize how little force alone avails without the backing of a keen and active mind.

Billy had had his first lesson in this regard, and though, at the moment, he did not realize how important and far-reaching was the principle involved, his feet were set upon the right path.

CHAPTER XLIII.

TROUBLE ON THE TEAM.

Though Cromwell had too much sense to credit Coors with the responsibility for his humiliation before the entire football squad, the incident only made him the more bitter toward the Colorado chap.

Instead of getting even and showing up well before the others, he had plunged in even deeper, and one more tally was added to the score which he was determined some day to settle.

He made no more attempts to do anything during the progress of practice. The lesson had been taken to heart, and, besides, with every day, his interest and enthusiasm in the game grew by leaps and bounds.

He was rapidly imbibing some of that impalpable, but powerful, quality known as school spirit. Day by day Farnham Hall and its inmates became more and more dear to him, until he realized at last that one of the worst things which could happen would be the necessity of his leaving Bloomfield.

He did not understand the change at all. A few short weeks before he had fought with all his might against coming, and even after his arrival he had been desperately anxious to get away. Now had come this curious and seemingly inexplicable change in his feelings toward everything.

He did not realize that it was simply the natural, inevitable liking every boy has for his fellows. Never

having been thrown with boys of his own age, he had had no means of knowing anything about such companionship.

Even now, not being in the least introspective, he did not try to puzzle out the why and wherefore, but took things as they came, enjoying the atmosphere of good-natured rivalry, the joking give-and-take, and all the other varied interests which were constantly cropping up about him.

He made many friends and a few enemies. His playing on the gridiron improved until he was looked on as one of the most promising members of the scrub. He kept track of the various rival teams with whom they were scheduled to play, and joined in the frequent serious discussions of their chances for a championship that year.

In addition, he did fairly well in his studies, especially considering the decidedly poor grounding he had had, and he also found time to enter into some of the mischief and harmless pranks that constantly went on about the school.

He was, in fact, just a normal, ordinary boy, whose development along the usual lines had been delayed, and which, therefore, progressed faster than it usually does.

Then, about a week before the first real game, came the unexpected elevation to the first eleven. It was truly unexpected to him, though some of the others had seen it coming for several days, and his delight was proportionately great. At once he took on a new gravity suitable to his position. He cut out the pranks and horseplay as taking up too much time and being,

moreover, much too frivolous for one of those eleven men on whom the hopes of the entire school were centered, and he devoted his every effort toward making himself even more proficient in the game.

To one thing he still clung, however. Not for a single instant did he cease to regard Herman Coors as his bitter enemy. The idea possessed him to such a degree that he read into the brown-eyed chap's most casual actions and utterances things which were never intended to be there.

Seeing Coors in the midst of a group of laughing, jesting boys, Billy instantly concluded that he himself was being discussed and made fun of. Or, when the half back, growing weary of the persistent chilly looks and ill-tempered manners of the Arizona boy, proceeded calmly to ignore the fellow at all times and places, Cromwell set him down as stuck-up and proud.

Only a few days after Billy had been advanced to the first team there came an upheaval which quite changed football conditions. To the surprise of all but a very few, Ogden Marshall resigned from the captaincy. Though no one was really sure, several fellows, who were better posted or more observing than the majority, made a shrewd guess that the resignation had been requested by Frank Merriwell himself.

The latter rarely interfered in the management of athletics, but Marshall had not made good to the extent he promised at first. He was pleasant and genial, and rather popular, but, unfortunately, he did not apply to himself the very sensible homily he had delivered that day on the field to Cromwell.

Instead of placing the good of the team ahead of

everything, he allowed his personal likes and dislikes to interfere with his judgment, and he endeavored to keep Don Shasta, one of the best quarter backs Farnham Hall had ever seen, from remaining on the team.

Whatever the reason, he resigned and Jim Phillips was elected to take his place.

At first Billy was rather sorry. He and Marshall had gotten along very well together ever since the day of the latter's lecture, and Phillips, in the position of captain, was more or less of an unknown quantity.

Personally, he turned out to be more than competent, but he was handicapped by difficulties which were not of his own making. Marshall, though leaving office, still remained on the team, and it was almost inevitable that he should stir up a certain degree of ill feeling between his friends and the adherents of the new captain.

It never reached the point of an open rupture. There is no doubt that it would have been better all around had it done so, for in that case things would have come to a head. Unfortunately, however, it confined itself to underground rumblings which never reached the acute stage of an explosion, but which were infinitely harder to combat. The fellows played a good enough game, but they played it by themselves. There was no getting together and helping one another as is so often possible in football.

Marshall and two or three adherents looked askance at Phillips and his chosen friends, and were in turn gazed upon with a certain amount of envy and jealousy whenever they did something particularly good.

And then along came Billy Cromwell, who had developed into such a splendid end, and made matters worse with his little grudge against Coors. It would have been better had either of them held any other position on the team, for more than half the time they were the ones selected to execute the forward pass.

They were both unusually good at passing and receiving the ball, and for that reason they had been drilled in this maneuver until they had become almost perfect. But it was a more or less mechanical perfection, lacking that subtle something which is never present unless both fellows are in perfect sympathy and accord.

At the crisp, ripping out of the signal, Billy would race out from the line without the loss of a second, catch the ball easily, and start down the field with it. But always there was in his mind a consciousness of just who was sending it to him. Always he was on the lookout for a little slip in Coors' accuracy, and, though he might not even realize it himself, though he probably would have denied the accusation indignantly, it was a fact that he sometimes really hoped for a mistake from the half back, which would call down upon the chap he disliked so greatly the wrath of the captain.

Such playing may be mechanically perfect, but that is all. It is like a machine—without the spirit, the breath of life. It lacks the thing which makes men lead a forlorn hope, shoulder to shoulder, knee against knee, fighting desperately, determinedly, and together.

Jim Phillips saw it, and he did his best to remedy the failing. Unfortunately, however, such a failing

is not an easy thing to set right, because of its very indefiniteness. One cannot put a finger on any special spot and say that just here lies the difficulty. It is more general than specific, and nine times out of ten it is unaffected by persuasion or argument, impervious to pleading, and usually the realization of how fatal it is to the progress and good work of the team comes only after it is too late.

Phillips did his best—and failed. Then, realizing how important the matter was, he went to the head of the school and outlined the situation.

Merriwell, who had long ago seen how things were going, appeared at a meeting of the squad and addressed them in a simple, straightforward, convincing manner which seemed, at the time, to bring them to their senses.

The effect was only temporary, however. Within a few days some occurrence, slight and trivial in itself, ruffled the sensitive spirits of these youthful idiots, and set them going again.

Game after game was won, but often by scanty margins. One, which had been looked forward to as a cinch, was lost. And all the time the tussle of the season, the contest with Fardale, loomed bigger and bigger on the horizon.

CHAPTER XLIV.

COORS IS THROWN DOWN.

"That's the situation," concluded Jim Phillips, in a discouraged tone. "You've probably seen it as clearly as I have, but it's a bit of a relief to talk it out this way. If something doesn't happen between now and Saturday to stir up the fellows and make them realize the truth, we'll lose the game and with it the championship, as sure as I sit here."

To be strictly accurate he was not sitting at all, but squatting cross-legged before the log fire in the lounging room. His elbows rested on his knees, his chin was cupped in his tanned, muscular hands, and on his face was a look of real distress.

Herman Coors moved uneasily and glanced around the room, which was deserted save for the two by the fire.

"It's beastly, Jim," he acknowledged, his glance returning to his friend, "but I don't see what more you can do. You've talked yourself about black in the face already, and Mr. Merriwell has had a whack at them without making any real difference. Are you sure it's as bad as you think? We've won every game we've played this fall, except one."

Phillips frowned.

"Yes, and how have we won them?" he inquired sarcastically. "Look at the miserable score we made against Wellsburgh High. St. George scored against

us, which hasn't happened in four years. Peabody, Nelson Prep, Dean Military, Willston-Phillips—every one of them pushed us hard, and we were licked by Haddon. Think of that, Hermie—done by a one-horse school that hasn't even scored on Farnham Hall in the memory of man!"

"That was on account of Con Phelps," Coors expostulated, though not very convincingly. "He's a corking fellow and hammered out the best team they ever had."

Phillips straightened up and dropped his hands to his knees.

"Rot!" he retorted. "Is Phelps any better player than I am?"

"Not so good."

"Is he any better manager?"

"N-o."

"Of course he isn't. That sounds as if I had a swelled head, but you know I don't mean it that way at all. Phelps won because his men got together, and didn't have any private grudges, or else they put them aside and forgot them, not because he was a genius at organizing, or anything like it."

They were both wrong, though that made no difference in the principle of the thing. Conant Phelps had won because he had learned the Farnham Hall signals from a traitor who gave them away when he was dropped to the scrub for incompetence. Merriwell knew the details of the affair, but there were extenuating circumstances which made him keep that knowledge to himself.

"I reckon you're right, Jim," Coors returned slowly.

"But what can you do? What can anybody do? I don't think it'll be any use to talk to them again."

"It's up to you to do the talking this time," the captain returned pointedly.

"Me?" gasped Coors.

Phillips fixed him intently with his eyes.

"Exactly," he said tersely. "You and Billy Cromwell don't pull together for a cent, and it's up to you to get busy and straighten out whatever's wrong between you."

Coors' eyebrows went up in a whimsical way.

"Oh, I say, Jim," he protested, "how can I do that when I haven't an idea what it is?"

"You don't know?"

"No. I suppose it was the way we joshed him the day he came, that started him going, but everybody else was in that deal, and I don't see why he's picked me out to be sour on."

Phillips shrugged his shoulders.

"Find out," he said tersely. "Ask him."

"I can't do that, Jim," Coors protested, his face flushing. "I can't go up to the little fire eater who's given me the icy mitt from the beginning, and inquire politely what there is I've done that I can go on my knees and apologize for."

Phillips' black brows straightened into a single level line above his dark eyes.

"It's for the honor of the school, Hermie," he reminded. "A fellow ought to be able to do anything for that."

Coors tried to force a smile, but failed signally.

"Theoretically—yes," he agreed; "but, Jim, how

can I go to any chap and ask such a question? You wouldn't like it yourself."

Phillips rose to his feet and thrust both hands deep into his trousers pockets. His eyes were narrowed, half closed, as he stared fixedly at his companion.

"Like it!" he exclaimed. "That's not the point. It's not a question of liking or not. It's a question of being wiped off the face of the earth by Fardale, or putting up a good fight against them. Do you think it's been amusing or pleasant for me to pretty near go down on my knees to those other asses who can't get rid of their little, petty grudges and jealousies? Do you think it's been a joke to roar out the same lecture day after day and call down the same fellows for the same thing? Maybe you think I enjoy it and do it just for the pleasure of hearing my tongue wag. Of course, if you're so sensitive and delicate in your feelings that you'd rather see the school beaten than do something which is a little unpleasant——"

"Thunder, Jim!" Coors interposed, his tanned face aflame. "That's enough. I'll do what you want, but Heaven only knows whether anything will come of it or not."

"If it doesn't, it won't be your fault," the captain returned, with a tired smile. "Get busy and hunt him up right away. We haven't a lot of time to lose."

Without further words, Coors departed on the unpleasant errand. It was raining—a veritable November storm which stripped the last few dead leaves from the naked trees and sent them swirling in little eddies until they were caught and held by the sodden heaviness of the soaking ground. Practice was impossible,

and the location of any member of the eleven was extremely problematical.

Cromwell might be in any one of a dozen rooms, striving to while away the time which passed on such leaden wings. That he should be alone in his own quarters seemed the least likely of any supposition. Nevertheless, it was here that Coors found him, after a rapid but thorough search of hallways, library, and gym.

As the Colorado boy entered in response to Cromwell's perfunctory invitation, Billy shot a glance of incredulous surprise at him and stiffened slightly.

"Hello!" he said, with an attempt at nonchalance. "Sit down and rest your face and hands."

Coors sat, also with an effort at casualness which was not altogether a success.

"Rotten day," he essayed, to conceal his embarrassment.

"Beastly," agreed Billy, wondering what under the sun had brought him there.

There was a pause, during which each refrained with considerable effort from looking at the other. Finally Coors straightened up in his chair and drew a long breath.

"Look here, Cromwell," he began firmly.

Then he paused, drew another long breath, and, spurred on by the expression of restrained curiosity on his host's face, continued:

"You and I don't seem to have hit it off very well."

Cromwell shrugged his shoulders.

"Not exactly," he agreed shortly.

"I suppose——"

Coors hesitated. It was extremely hard. He had, in fact, never disliked anything so much in his life before, but it had to be done, just the same.

"I suppose," he continued slowly, "it was on account of—what happened—the day—you came."

Billy, puzzled, suspicious of some trap—he knew not what—shrugged his shoulders again.

"I don't see why you say that," he retorted.

Coors looked surprised.

"Well, I thought," he explained choppily, "that you—that you—— Well, it seemed as if you didn't like the way we—er—drew you out."

Cromwell laughed in an attempt at spontaneity.

"Oh, that!" he exclaimed carelessly. "I'd forgotten all about it long ago."

Coors looked puzzled.

"Then what——" he began, and trailed off into silence.

"Well?" questioned Billy.

The Colorado youth drew a long breath.

"Then why have you—er—been so—a—standoffish?"

Cromwell's eyes gleamed. He never supposed that such a chance as this would come to him.

"Have I, really?" he drawled. "I didn't know it. I suppose, though, a fellow can't like everybody, you know."

Coors' face hardened.

"The little fool!" he thought. "Does he think I'm here because I want to be friends with him? He needs a good swift kick, and I'd like a lot to give it to him."

Aloud he said, controlling his temper with an effort:

"Naturally. I was hoping, though, that since we have to do so much teamwork on the field, that we might do it better if we got together and let—er—bygones be bygones."

Cromwell bristled.

"If you have any criticism of my playing to make," he retorted, in an icy tone, "why don't you come out with it plainly?"

The half back's face flamed crimson, and he stood up abruptly. Flesh and blood could stand no more. If Phillips expected him to crawl in the dirt for the favor of this pig-headed kid, he had another guess coming.

"I should never dream of that," he said sarcastically. "Your playing is quite flawless. I wish I could say as much for your manners."

Without waiting for a response, he departed from the room, closing the door emphatically behind him.

"Got him going!" exclaimed Billy gleefully. "I reckon he won't try any more softsoap game with me. Wonder what he did it for, anyhow?"

He continued to wonder, and, as he thought over the interview, his triumphant expression wore a bit thin.

CHAPTER XLV.

ALL TO THE BAD.

The great day, which had been looked forward to with such varied feelings, was at length arrived. To some the arrival of the Fardale eleven was a cause for jubilant rejoicing, for they had a perfect—though somewhat foolishly optimistic—faith in their own team which had been victorious in every game but one that year.

Others, who were more thoughtfully inclined and more observant, were far from being so confident. Like Jim Phillips, they had noticed that lack of cohesion in the team. They remembered, too, that some of those victories had been barely snatched from defeat. To them the triumph of Haddon loomed up big and significant. If a little one-horse school like that could win against them, what possible chance had they with this aggregation of brawn and sinew from their greatest—really their only—rival?

Moreover, the sight of the visiting team was not reassuring. They were big, rangy fellows without exception, and must average a good five pounds heavier than the Farnham Hall boys. As they descended from the wagonette, they seemed to be on excellent terms with each other. There was much laughter and joking, and arms frequently rested carelessly on other shoulders. It might, of course, be simply the natural drawing together which every crowd of boys shows in

a strange place, but many took it as an evidence of the important quality which their own team lacked.

Upon Jim Phillips the calmness of desperation seemed to have descended. The night before he had gathered his men together and given them a last serious talk, into which he put every bit of persuasion he possessed. He told them again, in simple, straightforward terms, which spared no one, what he had spoken of so many times before, and what they must do in order to escape defeat. Now, apparently, he felt that he had done his best. The result rested with Fate.

Just before the game, however, in the rough little room beneath one of the stands, which served as a general gathering place and retreat during intermission, he spoke again, but briefly.

"You're up against a hard proposition to-day, fellows," he said, in that pleasant, ringing voice of his; "but you're going to win out. You've got to! You're fighting for the school, and that's something much bigger and more worth while than anything you could fight for. I'm not going to say another word but this: Get together! Fight shoulder to shoulder, and remember that you're going to win for Farnham Hall in spite of everything. That's all, except that Mr. Merriwell wants a word with each of you."

They stood up slowly, perhaps a little nervously, and glanced toward the door, near which Merry leaned against the wall. Above them came the tread of many feet as the stands rapidly filled, mingled with the loud buzz of excited voices.

Billy was conscious of a queer, choky feeling which

had never come to him at any of the other games, and for a second he wondered whether, by chance, Phillips' continued harping on "get together" could possibly have any reference to him.

"Pshaw!" he muttered an instant later. "How can it? I don't like Coors a little bit, but that doesn't interfere with my playing. It's all nonsense! All the fellows on the team can't very well be bosom friends."

Thrusting the matter deliberately from his mind, he tightened his belt, carefully relaced one shoe, and then straightened up to hear respectfully the few terse words of professional advice and warning which Merriwell, as coach, had to give him.

As they trotted out into the field a little later, a compact, sturdy body of fellows, an enthusiastic cheer rang out from the crowded stands which thrilled him and made his blood tingle.

How could he help doing his best when all that crowd was counting on him, as on the ten others? Of course they were going to win—they had to!

They won the toss and chose the goal favored by a heavy wind. The teams lined up, and Billy crouched, ready for Fardale's kick-off.

The ball fell short, retarded by the gale, and was caught neatly by Herman Coors, who started zigzagging down the field. Billy raced after, conscious of a feeling of envy. A moment later his enemy went down under the impact of three Fardale men, and for a time the boy from Arizona forgot everything but the progress of the game.

The second play was a rush through the line be-

tween end and tackle which gained for them a good six yards and raised a cheer from the spectators.

The next was not so fortunate. The compact Fardale line held steady and threw Ogden Marshall back without a gain. Then followed an attempt around the left end by Phillips, but some one got through and spoiled that play.

The signal for a forward pass sent Billy into position like a flash. This time he would do something and show those cocky visitors that there was one man on the team who was on his job. The forward pass at this stage of the game was to be sprung as a surprise on Fardale.

Perhaps it was the fault of the wind, perhaps not. At all events the ball did not come as cleanly accurate as usual, and Billy stumbled and nearly lost his balance in his effort to get it. Nevertheless, he whirled and started down the field, but that slight delay had been enough to get the Fardale boys in the jump, and he was brought to earth with a thud, after a gain of barely three yards.

Billy was furious. It had been done on purpose to put him in bad. It was just like Coors to do a thing like that, and, as he lined up again, Cromwell was wasting his time growling at the Colorado chap, instead of being on the jump for the next play.

It was a punt, of course, and he prepared for it mechanically, still harboring his grievance. The wind carried the ball far down the field—too far, in fact, for the ends to cover it. The Fardale back caught it neatly, and came dodging through the interference as if through a clear field. When at length he was brought

to earth by Jim Phillips, he had made a vastly greater gain than would ever have been possible had his opponents been playing together.

The spectators were swift to see this, and from the stands came a series of protesting shouts.

"Wake up, Farnham!"

"Get together!"

"Don't let 'em carry it the length of the field."

"Don't let 'em through like that!"

"Play close!"

Billy heard it with flushed cheeks, thinking of the contrast between this and the enthusiastic cheering which had greeted their appearance on the field. They must do something to show the boys that they were not as rotten as all that. Breathlessly he crouched and waited for the Fardale attack.

In an instant it came, a machinelike rush which carried their opponents off their feet and swept them back for a gain of ten yards. Again it came, solid and compact. Again a big gain.

The spectators begged excitedly for their team to "buck up and hold 'em." Phillips pleaded desperately for them to close in and get together. But still the enemy seemed to find holes in the line wherever they tried, and still that advance continued.

On Farnham Hall's thirty-yard line there was a fumble, and in a twinkling the ball went soaring down the field impelled by the accurate boot of George Winslow.

It was but a momentary respite, however. The charging Fardale line came back with it, and, in spite of every effort to stop them, had advanced into Farn-

ham Hall's territory when the shrill whistle announced the ending of the first quarter.

Billy welcomed it with a sigh of relief. He was not so cocky as he had been a little while before. What was the matter with the fellows, anyhow? Why didn't they stand up and play the game as it should be played?

It never occurred to him that he was to blame, as well as the others. He listened to the few biting words which Phillips uttered, and the calmer, but no less emphatic, voice of Merriwell saying practically the same thing. Then, before he knew it, he was back in the field again, bracing himself for another of those strenuous charges.

In the first five minutes, through another fumble, Phillips secured the ball and went twisting down the field, dodging, thrusting aside interference, helped a little at first by the blocking of Coors, who alone seemed to have sensed the situation, and made a touchdown.

A frenzied roar went up from the side lines, which continued long and loud until the goal was kicked. At last luck seemed to have turned and fortune was beginning to smile.

CHAPTER XLVI.

BILLY'S EYES ARE OPENED.

The optimism of the crowd was of short duration. With the change of goal, Fardale was favored by the wind, and began at once their systematic advance down the field.

This time, however, it was vastly quicker than before. Down after down netted them six, eight, and ten yards. They seemed to sweep aside the interference as lightly and easily as if it had been chaff. The fellows on the home team strove desperately to keep them back. Each man gave the best that was in him, but he played alone. There was no effort to help one another as there should have been, and the result was such that, in a phenomenally brief time, the enemy broke through the right end and swept over the remaining few yards for a touchdown.

They missed the goal, which was the only consoling feature of the day, and three minutes later the time for the second quarter was up.

His face white with anger and set in bitter, scornful lines, Jim Phillips led his men into the room beneath the grand stand and closed the door behind him. For a moment he stood there silent, his eyes ranging over the circle, a look in them which set lids to fluttering and feet to shuffling nervously.

"I hope you are proud of yourselves," he said scathingly at length. "I hope you're satisfied with the beau-

tiful exhibition you've made! By heavens! I never saw such a bunch of cowards in my life. That's what you are—cowards—quitters! There's not one of you who proved himself a real man. You play a mile apart, and there're holes as big as a house in the line. If you keep this up there'll be a score piled up against us such as was never known at Farnham before. A bunch of yellow quitters you are, and nothing else!"

"Oh, say, Jim!" expostulated Marshall, his face crimson. "It isn't as bad as that."

Phillips whirled on him, his eyes flashing.

"Isn't it, though?" he demanded. "It's up to you to show me, then. It's up to you to go out there and put up a decent fight, and prove to the school that there's something in you. It's up to you to get together and forget everything but the fact that you've got to hold them off. You may not win the game, but for Heaven's sake don't give it away! Fight to the last ditch, shoulder to shoulder, and if they make another touchdown, make 'em do it foot by foot, not ten yards and more at a time."

Shamefaced, the team presently filed out of the room again and to the field. Billy, resentful as he had been at first at those bitter, stinging words, felt growing within him a fierce determination never to give his captain a chance to say such things again. He would forget everything but the necessity for keeping together. He would play the game as he had never played it before, and it would not be his fault if defeat was their portion.

As they were lining up, he glanced backward and caught the eyes of Herman Coors fixed upon him.

Swiftly he crouched, wondering if he could ever bring himself to fight side by side with him.

That third quarter showed but little improvement on the other two. Without the advantage of the wind, Farnham Hall would surely have been defeated then and there. The boys tried in a measure to brace up and play close, but they had lost the knack of giving one another a helping hand, and in each fellow's mind was an embarrassed, awkward feeling at being the first to give way.

Back and forth the battle waged. When Fardale had the ball, she rushed it down the field with a united, machinelike regularity which was beautiful to see, in vivid contrast to the weaker, more or less futile, attack of her rival.

Time and time again the Farnham Hall line was driven almost to its very goal line, where, roused by their danger, by the stinging words of Phillips or Shasta, or the desperate entreaties of the spectators, they stiffened momentarily and somehow managed to fling back their opponents to a safer distance.

It was a losing game, however, and the spirits of the watchers, who followed the line of scrimmage with tense, drawn faces, sank lower and lower. Would they never brace up and fight like men? Were they going to let themselves be pushed over the line for another goal, and perhaps another still? The cheers grew half-hearted, perfunctory—the cheering of a crowd of fellows who have lost their faith and yell only from a sense of duty. There is no sound more evident or more discouraging.

Somehow Billy remembered the next interminable

quarter but vaguely. He was doing his best for the school, fighting against hope, in the face of despair. His brain was clear, and he never lost an opportunity to get into a play. But it seemed to him as if every attack was directed against his end. He wondered why they kept hammering him, and whether it was done by intention. His breath began to come in panting gasps, and his legs grew weary, but he never thought of giving in.

Suddenly he heard a voice in his ear, and felt a hand on his shoulder.

"Good boy, Billy! That was a corker! We'll get into the next one together."

It was Coors, and Billy felt a curious thrill go through him at the friendly touch of his enemy's hand. A moment later they were plunging through the line, shoulder to shoulder, for a good, substantial gain.

Something of the same thing must have happened with the others, for, little by little, the line closed in, and fellows who had disliked each other forgot their differences and petty quarrels. Side by side they fought, helping each other when they could, urging one another to greater endeavor in friendly voices which were, in themselves, a goad.

The effect was apparent in bigger gains, in better teamword—in everything.

Fighting like a demon, Billy was borne into the midst of almost every scrimmage. Once everything went black before him for a minute, and when he recovered his senses he found that it was Coors who had dragged him out of the mass and was holding him on his feet.

As he felt the friendly support of that muscular arm and saw the expression on the face of the fellow he had hated, something vanished from Billy's make-up and never returned.

Fellows who had fought together as they had, making a desperate struggle against overwhelming odds, could never be enemies.

Two minutes later the shrill call of time told that battered, exhausted line that they had won out. At the eleventh hour they had cast aside all rancor and ill feeling, to charge the enemy shoulder to shoulder, a single unit instead of a disorganized mass.

* * * * * * *

Tired, sore in every muscle, but blissfully happy, Billy Cromwell sat in the shadow of the stone-flagged terrace and watched the sparks eddy upward from the triumphal bonfire out in the open.

Beside him was Herman Coors, leaning against the brick wall of the building, and their shoulders touched as they had touched on the memorable field that afternoon.

They had fought it all over again, dwelling little on the "might-have beens," content with realities, and now they were silent.

Billy was thinking what a fool he had been to hold a grudge against this fellow who was such a bully sort, and wondering why he could have been blind so long.

All at once, out of the medley of talk and laughter which rose from the crowd about him, he heard a single sentence:

"Broncho certainly put up a corking game. It was sure enough lucky Hermie spoke up for him that day and got Marshall to keep him on the team."

Billy's heart leaped, and a rush of crimson stained his face. For a moment he sat perfectly still. Then he turned slowly to his companion.

"You—heard—that?" he asked, in a low, uneven voice.

Coors nodded, his eyes fixed on the flaming fire beyond.

"But why——" stammered Billy.

Coors laughed a little.

"I had a hunch you'd make good," he returned carelessly.

There was a long silence, which was presently broken by the Arizona chap.

"I don't see why you did it when I was such a rotten dub," he ventured.

Coors laughed again, and glanced quickly at his companion.

"I reckon I must have taken sort of a shine to you, kid," he chuckled. "Maybe it was because I was just like that myself when I first came East."

THE END.

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